Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

The Public is respectfully informed that THIS THEATRE

WILL BE OPENED

This present MONDAY, October 5, 1829.

When will be performed, Shakspeare's Tragedy of

ROMEO and JULIET.

Prince Escalus, Mr. HORREBOW, Paris, Mr. DURUSET,
Montague, Mr. TURNOUR, Capulet, Mr. EGERTON,
Romeo, Mr. ABBOTT,
(his first appearance at this Theatre these five years)
Mercutio, Mr. C. KEMBLE,
(his first appearance in that character)
Benvolio, Mr. BAKER, Tybalt, Mr. DIDDEAR, FriarJohn Mr. MEARS,
Friar Lawrence. Mr. WARDE,
(his first appearance in that character)
Apothecary, Mr. MEADOWS, Page Miss Fortescue, Balthazar, Mr. Irwin
Abram Mr Heath, Samson MrAtkins, Gregory Mr Norris, Peter, Mr. KEELEY
Juliet by Miss FANNY KEMBLE,
(Being her first appearance on any stage.)
Lady Capulet, *(on this occasion)* Mrs. C. KEMBLE,
Nurse, Mrs. DAVENPORT.

In act I. a Masquerade and Dance

Incidental to the Piece.

In act V. The Funeral Procession of Juliet, and a Solemn Dirge.

The Vocal Parts by Mess. Beale, Birt, Caulfield, Crumpton, Fuller, Goodson, Miller, May, Mears, Norris, Purday, Ransford, Shegog, G. Stansbury, C & S. Tett, Wood, &c &c.

Mesdames Appleton, Brown, Cawse, H. Cawse, Clarke, Daly, Fenwick, Forde, Fortescue, Goodwin, Keeley, Hughes, Hudson, Nicholson, Perry, Phillips, J. Scott, Weston, &c. &c.

To which will be added, the Melo-Drama of

The Miller & His Men.

Grindoff, *(the Miller)* Mr. FARLEY,
Count Friberg, Mr. HORREBOW, Karl (his servant) Mr. BLANCHARD, Lothair, Mr. DURUSET,
Kelmar (an old Cottager) Mr. EVANS, Riber and Golotz (two Banditti) Mess. HENRY and MEARS,
Zingra, Mr. NORRIS, Lindorf, Mr. S. TETT, Coburg, Mr. FULLER,
Claudine, Mrs. VINING, Ravina, Miss LACY,

A NEW STAIRCASE *leading to the Dress Circle only*, has been constructed at the Bow-street

can also be had.

*** For the better preservation of decorum and security of the Public, the arrangements before the Curtain will be put under the direction of the new Metropolitan Police.

The DOORS to be opened at Half-past Six o'clock, and the Play to begin exactly at Seven.

Boxes 7s. Second Price 8s. 6d.—Pit 3s.6d. Second Price 2s.—Gallery 2s. Second Price 1s.—Upper Gallery 1s.

☞ *The peculiar legal liabilities to which Mr. C. Kemble is subject, prevent any alteration in the Prices of Admission.*

Miss KELLY

has consented to perform gratuitously for *Ten Nights*, & will make her first appearance on *Tuesday* next.

Miss FOOTE

has also given her services for *Ten Nights*, and will appear as soon as her provincial engagements will permit.

Mr. T. P. COOKE

has offered to act for *Six Nights* gratuitously, and due notice will be given of his first appearance.

Mr. KEAN

will act *Three Nights* gratuitously, immediately on his return to London.

Mons. DROUET

has also volunteered to perform on the FLUTE for *Three Nights*—his first appearance will be on Wednesday next.

Tomorrow, will be revived the Comedy of **THE PROVOKED HUSBAND.**

Lord Townley, Mr. C. KEMBLE, Sir Francis Wronghead, Mr. FAWCETT,
Mr. Manly, Mr. ABBOTT, Squire Richard, Mr. MEADOWS, John Moody, Mr. BLANCHARD,
Lady Townley, Miss ELLEN TREE, (*her first appearance on this stage*)
Lady Grace, Miss LAWRENCE, (*from the Theatre Royal, Manchester,—her first appearance on this stage.*)
Lady Wronghead, Mrs. DAVENPORT, Miss Jenny, Miss NELSON (*her first appearance in that character*)

After which will be produced (*for the first time at this Theatre*) the celebrated Melo-Drama of

THERESE; or, The ORPHAN of GENEVA.

Fontaine, Mr. ABBOTT, Carwin, Mr. WARDE, Lavigne, Mr. MEADOWS,
Count, Mr. DURUSET, Delparc, Mr. EGERTON, Picard, Mr. EVANS,
Therèse, Miss KELLY,
Countess. Miss LACY, Bridget, Mrs. GIBBS.

On Wednesday, the Comedy of **THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.**

Lord Ogleby, Mr. JONES,
(*From the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh,—his first appearance at this Theatre.*)
Sir John Melvil, Mr. ABBOTT, Sterling, Mr. FAWCETT, Lovewell, Mr. WARDE, Cantou Mr. FARLEY
Brush, Mr. POWER, Mrs. Heidelberg, Mrs. DAVENPORT, Miss Sterling, Mrs. GIBBS,
Fanny, Miss ELLEN TREE, Betty, Mrs. J. HUGHES.

End of the Comedy, Mons. DROUET will perform WEBER's favourite Air, "*The Huntsman's Chorus*," with variations for the **FLUTE**, arranged by himself.

To which will be added the last new popular Melo-Drama called **THE DEVIL'S ELIXIR.**

A NEW COMEDY

in two acts, is in rehearsal, and will be produced on *Saturday*, Oct. 10.

The characters by Mr. C. KEMBLE, Mr. WARDE, Mr. BLANCHARD, Mr. KEELEY,
Miss ELLEN TREE, Mrs. GIBBS, Miss FORDE.

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AFFECTIONATELY YOURS, FANNY



FANNY KEMBLE
The Lawrence Sketch

AFFECTIONATELY YOURS

Fanny

FANNY KEMBLE *and the* THEATRE

by

HENRY GIBBS

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(All the above illustrations with the exception of The Playbill, are reproduced by courtesy of EDWARD H. GOOCH, LIMITED.)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

MR. PETER QUENNELL prefaced the Introduction to his admirable *Byron: The Years of Fame* with the words: "Another book on Byron!" I have the strongest temptation to employ a similar opening to this study of Fanny Kemble. Yet the attempt was necessary, I felt, not because my task has been importanenced by the discovery of new material about Fanny, but solely because much of what is vital to understanding her has been so curiously overlooked.

Fanny Kemble has been, and may well remain, a source of great controversy. Her severest critics are inclined to dismiss her as being wholly unimportant as an actress; recently, in his interesting study *These Were Actors*, Mr. James Agate joined their ranks. On the other hand, those who may be deemed her friends appear to have been so blinded by the drama of Fanny's life that they fail to see and judge her clearly. What is more important, both sides overlook the conditions and influences operative in the British theatre in the years during which she was associated with it, ignore the not inconsiderable weight of Kemble family history and its effect upon her character, and, in my submission, ignore even more disastrously the state of the British theatre and its drama during her early life. These considerations provide my justification for penning another book on Fanny Kemble. I have attempted to see her not so much as an actress without reference to time as an actress in relation to a particular period in theatrical history. This appears the surest way in which to form a lasting judgment; few players in history can rise above the conventions operative in their time, and these conventions are not those concerned solely with acting. The period in which Fanny Kemble was an actress was wholly unique; an era was fast reaching its end, monopoly was losing its control, the slow stir of revolutionary ideas—in acting, in presentation, in plays, in public demand—was in being. Is it possible to see any individual clearly without paying due attention to such considerations? I think not.

This personal opinion may answer, in some measure, a previous divergence of opinion between a critic and myself. Reviewing a previous work of mine, my friend asked whether it was not a mistake to make the background of a novel as important as the characters whose affairs it followed. While appreciating this point, I cannot share it, particularly as the novel in question, one section of a trilogy, was an attempt to show how a turbulent period of history affected the lives of two people. So with Fanny Kemble. In settled times, in settled spheres, the individual can accept without question and be well-based in fundamentals; in unsettled times most men and women reflect in some measure the instability of their days. To understand them more surely it is necessary to gain some knowledge of the background to their lives or we may well miss what caused their individual shaping in life. Hence, in this study of Fanny Kemble, I have attempted to trace what I believe to be significant to her among the minutiæ of her daily life; occasionally this attempt may make the record

appear to move away from its subject but I cannot share such an opinion. It appeared to me, when starting to write of Fanny, the only way in which I could gain a faithful understanding of what helped to make Fanny Kemble the woman she became.

My grateful thanks are due to several friends who have encouraged and assisted me during the writing of this book. I would like to thank William Gaunt, who found time to encourage me to attempt this work though he was then busy marshalling the Æsthetics into order; to Lydia Sokolova, who assisted me in tracing authoritative material; and also to MacQueen Pope, for his patient and kindly unravelling of many mysteries when he was also busy writing his brilliant history of *Theatre Royal Drury Lane*. I am also grateful to the Curators of the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, for permission to reproduce the playbill of Fanny's "first" first night, from the Enthoven Collection.

HENRY GIBBS

ST. JOHN'S WOOD,
LONDON,
December 1945

CHAPTER I

(1)

THE first years of the nineteenth century found a Britain undergoing the first phase of a revolution which was to reach around the world and alter every aspect of life it touched: the revolution of industrialization. Across the fields, hills and woods of England, from the Irish Channel to the North Sea, were spun the first webs of industry, the wild, untamed, ugly virility of the machines which was to stretch across the fields and hills and woods of every nation. In Britain the most noticeable change occasioned by the machines to this time had been to introduce a new pattern into the social fabric. Youngest sons of families associated throughout their entire history with the land left their homes to seek work in towns becoming famous for their industrial products; younger daughters left the country to marry men working in the factories and workshops. Men whose fathers had returned from the fields burned by the sun went home from the factories with their hair dyed green by acids. New classes of citizens were being formed, those of the industrial worker and commercial workers engaged in seeking to extend the markets of machine-made goods, The aristocracy and land-owning classes, perplexed by the changes occurring around them, not comprehending the sudden ascendancy of a class whose claim to share their privileges was supported only by a swift acquisition of money, sought distraction from confusion in the social system by fighting Buonaparte, by joining political factions in one or other European country where the issues at stake were less muddled, and in the fashionable amusements of the day.

In a London busier than it had ever been, where the streets were reaching out like tentacles towards and around villages on the outskirts, the 'West End' was a new name for distraction from the chaos of industrialism in the north and Midlands and Buonaparte's marchings back and forth across the map of Europe.

The core of this 'West End' was Covent Garden, a district of taverns, coffee-houses, and brothels which attempted vague disguise under the more salubrious title of bagnios. Here, at night, *mesdames de la citie*, clad in the fashionable white dresses, which were caught under the breasts and left throat and arms bewitchingly bare, could be observed parading their charms round the piazzas, watched by gentlemen and moneyed merchants from inside the coaches which had brought them into town to see the sights of London's night-life. Other distractions were the first supper clubs with their concert rooms and, here and there, a whisper of rites of Black Magic; the numerous forms of musical entertainment, places like the Pantheon, Vauxhall Gardens, Almack's; temples of health. And the theatres.

(2)

The entertainment afforded by the London stage at that time was little different from what it had been for a long time past, though it differed considerably from what it was to become within the next half-century. An era of theatrical history, an era which had commenced with the Restoration, was nearing its end. Throughout the whole of that time one factor had outweighed all others in the magnitude of its effect upon the stage and those associated with it—the fact that theatres presenting drama operated solely under Royal Patent.

Originally, in the time of Charles, the Patent system had brought relief to the sorely tried and derided players, but ultimately it had proved more curse than blessing.

Because of the Patent (to which it will be necessary to refer in order to appreciate its effect upon Covent Garden Theatre and Fanny Kemble) there were few theatres in London. The short list was headed by Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Other theatres were in existence, when not lying in charred ruins from the fires which had plagued them for over a hundred years. There was the Haymarket, where, in 1736, a performance of the satire *The Historical Register* so narrowly escaped libelling the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, that it added its contribution to theatrical history upon a higher scale by causing the passage of an Act which necessitated that the Lord Chamberlain's licence had to be obtained before a play could be publicly presented. The Haymarket escaped fire, but, in 1794, witnessed a riot at a command performance for George III. There was Sadler's Wells, the original home of the famous clown Grimaldi, where water dramas and equestrian performances were presented from early in the nineteenth century until 1844. And there was the Lyceum, which failed to gain a royal licence to operate as a theatre, in 1794, and housed Madame Tussaud's waxworks from 1802 until fire destroyed Drury Lane and the company there transferred to the Lyceum until the Lane opened again in 1812.

In addition to these theatres there were a number of other centres of entertainment. Astley's amphitheatre in Westminster Bridge Road, and its rival, the flamboyantly titled 'Royal Equestrian Philharmonic Academy' which enticed patronage with 'the docility, strength, sagacity, and gracefulness' of the horse and 'expertness, agility and ease' of human performers.[1] At these places programmes were varied with firework displays, processions of transparent figures and decorations. For other tastes there was Vauxhall Gardens, with its tree-shaded walks, the pavilion and semi-circular arcade, illuminated at night by hundreds of small lamps; here it was that Fanny Burney's Evelina found delight in 'The trees, the numerous lights, and the company in the circle round the orchestra (which) make a most brilliant and gay appearance. . . . There was a concert; in the course of which a hautbois concerto was so charmingly played that I could have thought myself upon enchanted ground had I had spirits more gentle to associate with. The hautbois in the open air is heavenly.' There was Almack's, *the* centre for dancing, with its weekly balls and exclusive company. The Pantheon offered masques, concerts, and opera, under its gleaming chandeliers,

[1] Mr. Willson Disher has provided an invaluable record of Astleys in his fascinating *The Grandest Show on Earth*.

and here nuns and witches, huntsmen and shepherdesses, Indian queens and monks, the favourite guises for fancy dress masquerades, danced night into day as they did at Marylebone Gardens.

To meet the competition of these places of amusement and others which offered similar fare, the theatres afforded a very different programme from that presented by theatres a century later. During the theatrical season, from September or October until the following June, performances started between six and seven o'clock in the evening and frequently lasted until midnight. The performance was continuous. An average bill-of-fare contained three items: a one-act play to serve as appetizer, a lengthier drama which provided the main course, and, finally, a farce as sweet. Most managements admitted late-comers at half-price after nine o'clock. The original playbill for Fanny Kemble's first appearance at Covent Garden in *Romeo and Juliet* announces a masquerade and dance to enliven Act I; a solemn dirge by thirty-six performers—and an imposing quantity of '& etcs'—for Act V; and the 'Melo-Drama *The Miller and His Men*.' The same bill contains other items which appear to have assumed the dimensions of added spectacle, notably the announcement that 'For the better preservation of decorum and security of the Public, the arrangements before the curtain will be put under the direction of the new Metropolitan Police.'

Evenings at the theatre in those days needed more substantial fare than is to be found in later days. From contemporary accounts it can be seen that the audience sustained itself with hot meat pies, baked potatoes, and mugs of ale, brought in from the surrounding streets. One writer, describing the scene at the Coburg Theatre (opened in 1818 and known subsequently as the Old Vic), a home of musical entertainment, wrote: 'The lower orders rush there in mobs, and in shirt-sleeves, frantically drink ginger-beer, munch apples, crack nuts, call the actors by their Christian names, and throw them orange-peel and apples by way of bouquets.'

It was notably in the relationship between audience and players that the theatre of that era differed markedly from that of a century later. In *English Night Life* the late Thomas Burke summed up the situation existing in the first half of the nineteenth century with admirable succinctness: 'Actors and actresses had not only to work well for their masters but to work hard.' The description of the audience as 'the masters' is no whit incorrect. The causes for the situation were varied and numerous. No outstanding playwright appeared in the early years of the nineteenth century. Audiences were well acquainted with the majority of plays presented, especially the more important, with their form and structure, and were apt to base their appreciation of a particular characterization upon that given by the last actor or actress who had interpreted it. This tendency, though perhaps inevitable in an era when the leading players were acclaimed largely for their interpretation of well-known roles, gave the audience a feeling of power over the players, a control usually most marked when a portrayal was disliked through not obeying the conventions. Another cause was that only Covent Garden and Drury Lane were allowed to provide drama, a fact which strengthened the habitual theatregoer's opinion that he could state his dislikes more forcibly than his likes. Finally, the audience held the players in some contempt, an attitude which developed before the days of the Restoration.

(3)

At the time when Cromwell and the Puritans had controlled the fate of England they loosed their harshest measures upon the theatre and its players. Public performances of plays had been forbidden. An Order of Parliament in 1642 stated: 'Whereas publike sports doe not well agree with publike Calamaties, nor publike stage-players with the Seasons of Humiliation, and the other being Spectacles of, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth and Levitie, it is therefore thought fit, and ordeined by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament Assembled, that while these sad Causes and set times of Humiliation doe continue, publike Stage-playes shall cease, and bee forborne. . . .' As a result of this measure, most players left London and the provincial cities, wandering from town to town to earn a living as best they could. Only a few stalwarts remained, to defy the Government by performing in private houses. The Puritans, like all dictatorial authorities, did not care to have their authority flouted. An Act of 1647 decreed that persons performing 'stage-playes, interludes, or other common playes' were to be imprisoned as rogues. In the following year authorities who arrested players were empowered to whip them publicly, confiscate their money for the poor, while spectators at any performance of a play could be fined five shillings. Six years later, in 1654, one newspaper, more kindly disposed than the many, commented on 'the poor actors, who have a long time lingered under the heavy yoke of poverty, and fed themselves and their families with hunger, sighs, and tears; yet not one of these poor men, during this long winter of many years' debarment from the exercise of that quality but have continued always civill and honest in life and conversation.' This kindly mention produced no noticeable betterment in players' conditions. Those who had gone on the road in hope of escaping the tight Puritan control upon London and the cities soon learned the folly of their hope. Many turned to other trades, eking out a bare existence as best they could. A few risked whipping and imprisonment by supplementing their income with a few coins earned from giving illicit performances at secretly organized plays in private houses.

The odium which the Puritans attached to the profession frequently clung to an individual long after he had taken up a different form of living. He was regarded as worse than a gipsy, a practitioner of the Black Arts; thefts in the district where he lived were apt to be laid at his door; mysterious deaths, even vanished servant-maids, were attributed to his lawless nature. The public attitude towards players did not undergo immediate transformation with the Restoration in 1660. When Charles II arrived in England three theatrical companies were attempting a precarious existence. Charles authorized Sir Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant to organize two companies and, under patents granted by him, the two companies were started, Killigrew's at a number of Theatres Royal, D'Avenant's at the Duke's houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields and in Dorset Gardens. The two companies amalgamated into one in 1683 and remained as one for thirteen years, and were frequently attended by Charles and his friends.

The mere fact of Charles's interest in the theatre, and members of its personnel, did much to keep alive the public's suspicion and dislike of players. Charles

was marked as a dilettante. He brought to London a great many foreign, 'Frenchified' ways. He associated openly with people who had only recently been classified as rogues and vagrants. And with Charles on the throne women appeared on the stage. This last fact alone was sufficient to increase, rather than diminish, public distaste for the stage. Previously to the Restoration the stage had been considered too low for any woman to adopt it as a calling; female parts had been played by men and boys, the one best known to history being Master Willy Hewes, to whom some believe that Shakespeare dedicated the famous *Sonnet XX*, claiming that this proves Shakespeare to have been homosexual. Apart from a company of French players who had visited London, bringing a number of women with them, the only woman to appear on the English stage before had been Mrs. Coleman, who is held by some to have been the first actress. This opinion has little to support it. Mrs. Coleman did appear at a private performance of D'Avenant's opera *The Siege of Rhodes*, at Holland House, in 1656, but she only sang and was unpaid. The first professional actress would appear to be Mrs. Hughes, a member of Killigrew's company, who became the mistress of Prince Rupert, Charles's nephew. The public was not unaware of this liaison, which attracted almost as much attention as that between Charles and Nell Gwynn. In Charles's time although men still appeared in female parts on the stage an increasing number of women adopted the profession; a quantity of the ladies obtained male patronage—consequently the view held by the Puritans that actors were common rascals was strengthened after the Restoration by a common opinion that to call a woman an actress was tantamount to holding her to be a prostitute.

Charles's London housing two companies of 'His Majesty's Players,' small bands of unlicensed players were formed in the provinces. Most towns had one such company based upon it and making short tours through the surrounding country-side. Other small bands of players strolled from one small town to the next, attempting to eke out a bare living from performing at fairgrounds, in taverns and disused barns. These were the true strollers, enduring a hard, poverty-ridden existence, carrying their props with them, acting in borrowed curtains and blankets. In *Recollections of the Stage* John Bernard recalled his first experience as an actor in an inn room which had 'a collection of green tatters along its middle for a curtain . . . a pair of paper screens right-hand and left for the wings . . . four candles in front of said wings to divide the stage from the orchestra (the fiddlers' chairs being legitimate division of the orchestra from the Pit) . . . and a hoop suspended from the ceiling . . . to suggest the idea of a chandelier . . . a Theatre.' Prejudice against the players continued to be shown, often for the most stupid reasons. The story is told of how Elrington, the Irish stroller, when appearing in Manchester, announced that the first receipts of his company's performances would be donated to a new hospital; whereupon the entire company was hauled before the local magistrate and subsequently chased from town for having 'insulted the subscribers to that institution.'

Upon occasion the patent theatres witnessed ugly scenes. In February 1680 swords were drawn at the theatre controlled by Sir William D'Avenant when a member of the audience, inspired to a public declaration of exactitude, called 'Poor Nellie' a whore and William Herbert, later Earl of Pembroke, drew blood

in defending her name. At Drury Lane, in September 1751, two gallants fought a duel in the vestibule during a performance of *The Way of the World;* sounds of the sword-play led the audience to believe that the building was on fire, causing a number of people to lose their lives when panic broke out and a stampede to the doors was accompanied by street-women in the gallery jumping into the pit. There were nights when the audience divided into factions and fought each other in the theatre, continuing a lengthy quarrel between those in the pit and those in the gallery, in the private boxes and in the pit. 'Then ensued strange scenes and encounters,' as Dr. Doran says in *Their Majesties' Servants.* Gentlemen sprang from their boxes with drawn swords; the pit met the encounter in like fashion; overhead the gallery shouted and pelted contestants with whatever lay to hand; on the stage the actors went through their play in dumb-show. On such evenings as these, should the audience turn against the players, the argument ended with the audience breaking up the benches on which they sat, tearing down hangings in the auditorium, smashing mirrors, destroying the orchestra's instruments, and finally surging on to the stage to smash the scenery and beat the players.

The audience was, by tradition, the master.

Most players from 1587, the year in which Gosson wrote and published his infamous *Short Treatise against Stage Playes,* until the 1850's, experienced some aspect of the public's dislike of theatrical people. Oddly enough, critics of the stage appear to have held the view that the players themselves were responsible for whatever happened, even for the occasional riots. Their argument was that any disaster or indecency in which either a theatre or a player was involved was due to the detrimental effect the stage had upon mankind, loosing the baser passions until they were beyond control. It is remarkable that any artist could establish his or her position in such an atmosphere, give to the world full measure of their greatness, yet from that age have come such names as Mohun, Betterton, Macklin, Kyneston, Nokes, and many more.

The theatrical history of the Kemble family, outstanding in the English theatre, began among the strolling players in the middle of the eighteenth century, at a time when the strollers were waging a grim struggle for existence.

(4)

Roger Kemble, father of the family, was born in Hereford in 1721. He is reputed to have begun life as a hairdresser. Some biographers of the Kembles accept Roger's claim to have been connected with an old English Catholic family, to a Father Kemble who died for his religion and a Captain Kemble who had performed feats of derring-do at the Battle of Worcester. There is no reliable evidence supporting either claim, despite the fact that Roger was a Catholic, but there were several excellent reasons why he should have made them. In his mature years, father of a large family, earning his and their livelihood in a way which awoke considerable criticism, at least, from his fellow-countrymen, Roger sought social stability as some others sought the Grail. He knew only too well that few things counted more with his fellow-citizens than claims to

piety, chivalry, and an air in which there lingered the faint, appetizing whiff of culture. Roger's whole ambition was centred upon his family's well-being. He was a strict disciplinarian and showed unfailing courtesy to everyone. His habits were temperate and, unlike many strollers, no one could ever accuse him of either being a drunkard or of drunkenness. He was loyal to his wife, as she was to him; another trait which met with general approval. His appearance was always neat and cleanly and, allied to his good manners and aristocratic good looks, made him something of a rarity amongst the strollers. All these qualities, acquired or accidental, played their part in shaping the future of his family.

There was romance in Roger's early years as a stroller. When it began we cannot be sure; records exist to prove that in 1752 he was wandering the country-side but do not show whether that year marked the start of his career or whether it had begun before then. In that year Roger, instead of seeking a good dependable living by dressing gentlemen's hair, joined a company of strolling players who were performing at Canterbury. With the company was a handsome lady known as Fanny Furnival, as flighty a piece as only handsome ladies have a right to be. Within a short space of time Roger had formed a liaison with Fanny. Neither of them was satisfied with their lot with the Canterbury company. They remained there only a short time and then strolled from Canterbury to Coventry. Here they parted company for what was intended to be only a short time. Fanny joined a troupe of players organized by a Mrs. Quelch while Roger, more adventurous, went on to Birmingham in search of training and employment as a player under John Ward, one of the outstanding provincial players of the day and for whose benefit the famous and flighty Peg Woffington once performed. The liaison proved short-lived. When arrangements had been made at Birmingham Roger returned to Coventry to collect Fanny. He was met by an Irishman whom Fanny had collected in the interval and who quickly replaced Roger in her affections. In a fit of chagrin Roger returned to Birmingham and discovered that Ward had a striking-looking daughter, named Sally. This lady's youth had been already enlivened by true romance; biographers tell us that she had once been 'tempted by a coronet.' What accompanied the coronet does not seem to have tempted her with corresponding inducements. In the year that followed, while performing in the bustling town of Cirencester, she married the new recruit.

Roger was Catholic; Sally a Protestant. It was agreed that if they should encounter the bugbear of all strollers, a family, the boys were to be brought up in their father's and the girls in their mother's faith.

They served their faiths well.

They had twelve children, four boys and eight girls: not even Catholics could complain of this division, particularly as some of the children died in infancy. Eight of the children reached maturity. The names of the twelve were Sarah, John Philip, Stephen, Frances, Elizabeth, Mary, Anne, Catherine, Lucy, Henry, Charles, and Jane. Sarah, the eldest, was born in Wales, on 5th July, 1755. She became the great Sarah Siddons, the most talented and famous actress of her day. Eighteen months after Sarah's appearance, on 1st February, 1757, John Philip was born in Prescott, Lancashire. He became the outstanding actor-manager of the period between Garrick and Kean.

It is interesting to note in passing that in those years actresses were not afraid to have children on account of losing their figure. Sarah herself had three children. This would seem to imply that some ladies in later generations have had the honesty to admit that their acting depends more upon the shape of their figures than upon ability.

The remainder of the brood, born between performances in taverns, barns, and fairgrounds, adopted their parents' profession as players, though not without conflict.

A playbill dated a few years after the marriage is worth noting:

Worcester, 12th February, 1767
MR. KEMBLE'S COMPANY OF COMEDIANS
At the Theatre *at the King's Head*, this evening will be performed
A CONCERT OF MUSIC
(To begin exactly at Six o'clock.)—Tickets to be had at the usual places.
Between the Parts of the Concert will be presented, gratis, a celebrated historical play (never performed here) called
CHARLES THE FIRST
The Characters to be dressed in ancient habits, *according to the fashion of those times.*

The Part of King Charles, Mr. Jones;
Duke of Richmond, Mr. Siddons;
Marquis of Lindsay, Mr. Salisbury;
Bishop Juxton, Mr. Fowler; Gen. Fairfax, Mr. Kemble; Col. Ireton, Mr. Crump; Col. Tomlinson, Mr. Hughes;
The Part of Oliver Cromwell, Mr. Vaughan; Servant, Mr. Butler;
James, Duke of York (afterwards King of England), Master J. Kemble;
Duke of Gloucester (King Charles's younger son), Miss Fanny Kemble;
Sergeant Bradshaw (Judge of the pretended High Court of Justice), Mr. Burton;
The Young Princess Elizabeth, Miss Kemble; Lady Fairfax, Mrs. Kemble;
The Part of the Queen, Mrs. Vaughan;
Singing between the Acts by Mrs. Fowler and Miss Kemble.

To which will be added, a Comedy called

THE MINOR

And on Saturday next, the 14th instant, will be again presented, the above Tragedy, with a Farce that will be expressed in the bills of the day.

The days of Performance are Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

Theatrical history is writ large in the bill. The play is presented—*gratis*—in the midst of a concert. This alone suffices to show how the players sought to disguise the taste of their wares between solid layers of the greater respectability, music. The theatre is in a tavern, the true home of the English theatre. Roger Kemble's name is there, as is that of his wife, John Philip, Sarah, and Fanny. The singing was done by Sarah. And, finally, in the role of the *Duke of Richmond*, there is the name of Henry Siddons.

At that time Sarah was twelve years old and John Philip ten. It was the year when John Philip was sent to a Catholic seminary near Wolverhampton. Roger intended his eldest son to become a priest. The quest for respectability occupied much of Roger and Sally Kembie's life; it would seem they had decided that if their profession condemned them to admit to lifelong unrespectability at least they would ensure godliness for one of their children and social betterment for the others as the occasion demanded. So John was packed off to the seminary. A college book recorded his arrival: 'John and (*sic*) Philip Kemble came 3rd November, 1767, and brought 4 suits of clothes, 12 shirts, 12 pairs of stockings, 6 pairs of shoes, 4 hats, a *Daily Companion*, a Half Manual, knives, forks, spoons, *Æsop's Fables*, combs, 1 brush, 8 handkerchives, 8 nightcaps.' Thus equipped, John spent four years in an unfamiliar atmosphere of sanctity, and was then dispatched to the even more salubrious and rigorous surroundings of the English College at Douai to take a regular divinity course, sweat over the lives of the saints, deliver homilies in scholastic Latin, and, on one memorable occasion, astound tutors and fellow-students alike by repeating fifteen hundred lines of Homer. Anyone who has faced the excruciating task of remembering even fifty lines of the epics will be abashed by such fortitude.

While John wrestled with Homer and spirituality in France, back at home in England Sarah was wrestling with more emotional problems. Unlike her mother, she was not 'tempted by a coronet,' but temptations arrived with maturity in sufficient complexity to give cause for alarm. She had attracted the attention of Henry Siddons, the actor named on the playbill, and, being a woman who knew she had awakened interest, was finding her own emotions flourish to some purpose. Her parents, however, were dismayed by the prospect of having their eldest daughter marry a player. Not without reason. They knew what life held for those without a settled home; they knew the perils and tribulations of the road; they had experienced the poverty and hunger which were the inevitable accompaniments of such a life. With their eldest son launched on the road to godliness, they disliked the thought of their eldest daughter becoming a stroller. Finally they gave their unwilling consent to the union, only to withdraw it immediately they found good reason. The reason was that a rival to Siddons had appeared on the stage. He was a country squire, a Mr. Evans, blessed with the solid temptation (in those days) of £300 a year and his own land. He had developed a passion for Sarah after hearing her sing *Robin, Sweet Robin* at a tavern concert, and forthwith invited her parents to persuade Sarah to share his land and £300 a year. To Roger and Sally Kemble, it was a temptation of significant dimensions.

Some hint of Sarah's strength of character, the inner determination which was to frighten Fanny Burney when they met many years later, made its first

appearance at this time. She refused Mr. Evans. Wisely, she also refused to elope with Siddons. There is in this refusal a hint of her inherited desire for respectability, a more exciting accomplishment than romance. Her father, in the manner of fathers faced with intractable daughters knowing they possess the initiative over the cause for youthful intractability, gave Siddons a benefit performance and dismissed him from the company. Sarah was similarly dispatched with some haste to become lady's maid to a Mrs. Greathead. Siddons, however, owned his own determination. He paid Sarah a number of visits. Sarah was sufficiently a woman not to accept an opportunity to leaven the solid fare of contrition with a sweetening of excitement; when Siddons appeared he was not sent away unkissed. What happened to Mr. Evans we do not know; his weighty responsibilities of money and land may have combined to entice him to hearken to other songs from other birds; we can only conjecture. It suffices to note that he realized what he faced and disappeared from the scene. And so, for once, love had its way. On 26th November, 1773, Sarah Kemble married Henry Siddons at Trinity Church, Coventry, and set out upon the road with him.

Siddons remains an almost unknown man—though some hearsay of him exists, there is no reliable information. Nowhere is there any sure proof of when or where he was born. He was undoubtedly some years older than Sarah; the playbill, and other evidence, reveals that much. He did not harm, and may well have greatly aided by his counsel, Sarah's career. Biographers of the Kembles accredit him with good looks and it was said he could play Hamlet and Harlequin, which implies versatility. Beyond that there is no dependable information. Like many others who have played an important part in shaping greatness, little of what he was like has remained.

Sarah had been on the road two years when John Philip arrived back from his religious pursuit at Douai, having landed at Bristol one bleak rainy afternoon in the winter of 1775. His arrival brought another shock for Roger and Sally. John announced that he had had his fill of religion as a lifetime occupation and was determined to become a player. He informed his horror-stricken parents of his decision and without waiting for their reply set off to join a company at Wolverhampton. The company did not want his services. John strolled from Wolverhampton to Liverpool to see his elder sister. He found that Sarah, then twenty years old, had two children, Henry born in October 1774 and a daughter only a few weeks old. Equally important, she had a contract from Garrick to appear at Drury Lane a few weeks later. John, suitably impressed, found his own determination strengthened by his sister's good fortune. It was indeed an accomplishment—a Kemble at Drury Lane. The world was changing. John made his resolve. Sarah might be the first to reach the London stage; she would not be the last. He made his farewell and set off on the road.

The playbill of Drury Lane for 29th December of that year announces a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*, adding with almost painful indifference: 'PORTIA, by A YOUNG LADY (being her first appearance).' The Young Lady was Sarah.

It proved to be a bad beginning. The critic of the *Gazetteer* found 'vulgarity in her tones,' and said, 'she is ill-calculated to sustain that line in a theatre she

has at first been held forth in.' Only the *Morning Post*, with, it would seem, more kindliness than truth, saw 'no unpromising presage of her future excellence,' and prophesied 'great eminence in her profession.' Some indication of how genuinely bad Sarah was in her first London appearance can be gained from the fact that when she played Portia again a few nights later, her name was omitted from the bill. Few managements, and certainly not the gentlemanly Garrick, treated players in such a way if the cause of their first failure was attributable to nerves.

This truth remains to hearten all young actresses that in her first London engagement Sarah Siddons failed. She failed not only in the role of Portia; she failed in every part she played. Of her performance in a play by a clergyman, Bates, *The Blackamoor Washed White*, the *Chronicle* said: 'All played well except Mrs. Siddons, who, having no comedy in her nature, rendered that ridiculous which the author evidently intended to be pleasant.' The critics were unanimous in pronouncing her performances 'lamentable.' Later, after a provincial tour, she was informed by the Drury Lane management that it had 'no occasion' for her services during the next season. The shock nearly killed her: only her determination saved her. In later years she herself wrote: 'My endeavours were blest with success, in spite of the degradation I had suffered in being banished from Drury Lane as a worthless candidate for fame and fortune.' She started round the provincial theatres . . . along the road again.

Meanwhile John was encountering his own difficulties. He spent three years with the strollers, acting, going hungry, writing plays, before he finally gained a hearing with the larger companies. During this time he met Lord Percy, later the Duke of Northumberland, a meeting which was to have a fortunate sequel in later life. John's character was developing. A lady of York, attending a performance of a play in which he was acting, interrupted the play continually by talking in a loud animated voice and screaming with laughter at the times when no player welcomes laughter. After a while John stopped the play and when called on to continue said he would do so only if the lady concluded her conversation; he did not wish the play to interrupt her. The woman was hissed out of the theatre. The next day a number of the lady's military friends called on the management with a demand that John should be dismissed. The manager refused to heed the demand. There was a demonstration at the theatre that night when the military gentlemen insisted John should make public apology to the lady. John is reported to have replied: "Ask pardon? Never!" and walked off the stage.

So Sarah and John Kemble toured. They appeared continuously, throughout the provinces, in the new theatres making their appearance in the cities, in Manchester, Liverpool, York, Dublin, Edinburgh, and Bath.

Sarah Siddons returned to London. To Drury Lane. And, this time, to fame.

The opening night was 10th October, 1782. Rehearsals lasted three days. Sarah arrived in town a fortnight before the rehearsals began. It needs little imagination to realize what she endured during those days, waiting and working for a second appearance at a theatre where she had failed and before a number of critics who had already condemned her out of hand. For those denied the

torment of imagination she left behind a record which tells something of the nervous tension she experienced:

> 'No wonder, for my own fate and that of my little family hung upon it. I had quitted Bath, where all my efforts had been successful, and I feared lest a second failure in London might influence the public mind greatly to my prejudice in the event of my return from Drury Lane disgraced as I had formerly been. . . . Who can imagine my terror? I feared to utter a sound (at rehearsals) above an audible whisper, but by degrees enthusiasm cheered me into a forgetfulness of my fears, and I unconsciously threw out my voice, which failed not to be heard in the remotest part of the house by a friend who kindly undertook to ascertain the happy circumstances. The countenances, no less than tears and flattering encouragements of my companions, emboldened me more and more; and the second rehearsal was even more affecting than the first. . . . I went to bed, therefore, in a state of dreadful suspense. Awaking the next morning, I found, upon speaking to my husband, that my voice was much clearer. This, of course, was a great comfort to me; and, moreover, the sun, which had been completely obscured for many days, shone brightly through my curtains. I hailed it, though tearfully yet thankfully, as a happy omen; and even now I am not ashamed of this (as it may perhaps be called) childish superstition. On the morning of the 10th my voice was, most happily, perfectly restored; and again "*The blessed sun shone brightly on me.*" On this eventful day my father arrived to comfort me, and to be a witness of my trial. He accompanied me to my dressing-room at the theatre. There he left me; and I, in one of what I call my desperate tranquillities, which usually impress me under terrific circumstances, there completed my dress, to the astonishment of my attendants, without uttering one word, though often sighing most profoundly.'

The play in which Sarah opened her second London appearance was *Isabella*, a tragedy bursting with great passion and tense drama. Sarah was an outstanding success. Women in the audience had hysterics, men broke down and sobbed. When the play ended the house was in an uproar of applause. Sarah Siddons had arrived. The following day the *Morning Chronicle* said: 'She wore her sorrows and agonies with such a natural simplicity that she arrested all attention.' The *Post* said she had triumphed over everything and was a great actress. That was one of the greatest nights at Drury Lane, outstanding in its long history. From that time on Sarah could do nothing wrong. She played *Isabella* for eight nights, then in a play called *The Grecian Daughter*, *Jane Shore*, and a number of others, all since forgotten if not actually lost. Her success increased with each part.

At this time John was acting in Dublin. He was not markedly successful. There was admittedly strength and dignity in his acting, but he was heavy, solemn, and too dignified to awaken great acclaim. His father's desire for social stability, his own student years, had given him the mentality of the pedant.

Sarah went to Dublin to join him, and appeared at the Theatre Royal in Smock Alley in the following June. The play was again *Isabella* and the audience was again transported. The orchestra wept, the audience wept; Digges wrote a

savage burlesque upon the scene which opened with 'On Saturday, Mrs. Siddons . . . exposed her beautiful, adamantine, soft and comely person, for the first time in the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley . . .'

The next Kemble to arrive in London was Stephen. He came to the capital the following September, arriving almost out of the blue, so obscured had he been by other members of the family, to play *Othello*, at Covent Garden. He was so well upholstered as to be able to play Falstaff without padding and was married to another player, Elizabeth Satchell. The Covent Garden venture failed and Stephen became a theatre manager.

On September 30th of the same year, 1783, John Kemble walked on to the stage of Drury Lane to deliver himself of 'A little more than kin, and less than kind' in the role of *Hamlet*.

If John was prepared for failure equal to that first experienced by Sarah, even his slightest fears were proven unfounded. The audience liked him. They appreciated the fresh quality of softness and sincerity in his performance. They enjoyed the obvious care and intelligence he brought to his reading and interpretation of the Dane. He was elaborate, carefully balanced, and had a good bearing. Said the *Herald:* 'We never saw a veteran make more use of stage tricks than this young performer.' Initial faults he removed by hard work and a willingness to accept criticism as though it were intended to help him, not reveal the critic's knowledge. He played the Dane twelve times, then played the Black Prince, Richard III, King John, Shylock, and other parts. The first play in which he appeared with Sarah was *The Gamester*.

From their earliest beginnings in poverty and continual uncertainty, the Kembles had climbed and now they had arrived. Throughout their lives they were to face criticism. They made enemies—the successful always do. Their enemies did their utmost to cause them harm. But the attempts, though sharp and continuous, failed. Sarah and John were established. And like others who gain success the hard way, they sought to strengthen their standing by accepting the opportunity to join the social circles.

What of the other Kembles? They had not been idle. One after another, down the years, they reached the stage. Charles, the best-looking, had followed John to Douai, later worked in the post office, and subsequently commenced a stage career at Sheffield in 1792. Frances appears to have tried and tried to have made a success on the stage; she is said to have been beautiful but weak in intelligence; a paper described one of her performances as showing that 'the closest alliance may be in blood, without the least in genius.' Frances gained her own form of revenge on the theatre. She married a dramatic critic named Twiss, and later kept a 'genteel seminary' for young ladies in Bath at 100 guineas per annum. Elizabeth also went on the stage, gained no attention, and had her revenge by marrying a theatrical manager with whom she went to America, where he died; she returned to London and appeared at Drury Lane in 1807. Another sister, Mrs. Curtis, became connected with the Dr. Graham who ran a temple of health at which Emmy Lyon, later Lady Hamilton, was once the chief attraction, posed as a Grecian goddess. Jane Kemble, 'a short, very short and lusty figure,' married a Mr. Mason, and went on the stage in Newcastle; she did not reach London until 1814, when she appeared at the

Haymarket Theatre; a notice of her death scene in the play states that 'she ran, she flew, like lightning up the hill.'

In 1788, John became manager of Drury Lane. The previous year he had undertaken the role of matrimony, when he married the widow of a lunatic, the actor Brereton, a lady who had been an actress, Priscilla Hopkins by name, daughter of an actress who had been with Garrick's company. John, pedantic, weighty even in matters of love, announced to Mrs. Brereton that she would 'presently hear a piece of good fortune which would surprise her.' She is stated to have asked her mother what this significant comment might mean, for John had unbent sufficiently to chuck her under the chin and given her the affectionate name of 'Pop.' Pop was petite and thirty years old. Her mother counselled her to accept the good fortune about to descend upon her. John and Pop were married on 8th December, 1787, and went to live in Caroline Street, off Bedford Square.

Save for one short interval John remained manager of Drury Lane from 1788 until 1801. In 1802, the year of Roger's death, John, faced with increasing confusion in the affairs at the Lane, went abroad. The following year, having borrowed money to purchase a sixth share in the Covent Garden theatre, he took over the management of that theatre.

For the first few years events moved smoothly. John introduced a number of innovations at Covent Garden. Amongst others he presented animals and Master Betty, attractions which were to have a bearing on later events at the theatre. In 1806 his brother Charles became the husband of Marie-Therese De Camp, an actress, daughter of a French army captain and a Swiss girl who married during the French invasion of Switzerland. Marie-Therese had been born in Vienna on the Empress's birthday and showed early ability to dance, sing, and act. Like the greatest actor of the first half of the ninteenth century, Edmund Kean, Marie had made her début as Cupid in a operatic ballet by Novello. George IV, while Prince of Wales, is said to have dandled her on his knee and delighted in putting her under a glass bell to resemble a Dresden figure. Marie played opposite Charles in comedy for some years before and after marriage. In this atmosphere of domestic peace and professional stability, only distantly menaced by the shadow of Napoleon, the Kembles progressed towards a disaster of far-reaching consequences.

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On the night of 19th September, 1808, Covent Garden was on fire. There was no water available. At seven o'clock the following morning the roof fell in, killing a number of firemen who had taken their engines under the colonnade. Almost everything in the theatre was destroyed: wardrobes, jewels, Handel's organ, wines belonging to the Beefsteak Club valued at £1,500, opera scores by Handel, Arne—composer of *Rule, Britannia*—and the originals of many old plays and new (even in those days theatre managements delighted in putting the works of aspiring playwrights on their shelves and forgetting them). In the dust-laden dawn of the following day the Kembles gathered at the ruins to console each

other over their loss. It was a tragic blow. Pop was full of lamentations at the misery of having to start all over again. John stood silent for a long time, staring at the still smouldering ruins, no doubt realizing that he had not yet paid back the money borrowed to purchase his share and recalling some of the hardships encountered in the thirty years he had spent on the stage. John did not lack courage or determination; he was not unversed in the risks forever hovering around those in the profession. He knew what difficulties his parents had faced in order to make a living as they wished; he and Sarah had been the first of Roger's and Sally's children to hear the call of the stage and every one of their brothers and sisters had followed them. The Kembles were now the country's foremost theatrical family; in his pocket was one of the two leading theatres in the land, not a barn draped with tattered hangings. The Kembles had become a theatrical tradition and he was not going to lose that position easily. Heedless of Pop's worried moans, John set himself to the task of organizing sufficient financial backing to rebuild Covent Garden theatre. He succeeded.

The new theatre, erected on the site of the old, is reported to have cost £150,000. The first offer of financial assistance came from the Duke of Northumberland. The Duke, formerly Lord Percy, had met John some years before in Coventry when John had been acting there and, to add realism to a battle sequence in a play, had borrowed the services of a number of stalwart Dragoons garrisoned nearby under Percy's command. Northumberland offered to lend John £10,000 towards the new theatre on the mere assurance of a promissory note; it is said that he subsequently tore up the note, on the opening night, and refused an assurance that the debt remained. Such generosity is seldom encountered. The first fifty thousand pounds was soon subscribed, hastened by the interest shown by Northumberland. On 30th December, 1808, the Prince of Wales laid the foundation stone of the new building and within eight months its shape arose, following the plans of the architect Richard Smirke, to tower above the taverns and coffee-houses of Covent Garden; a building patterned mainly on the lines of Minerva's Temple in Rome, decorated with lofty Doric columns and with the figures of Comedy and Tragedy in prominent positions.

There was always a risk in building a theatre, but John was backing his knowledge that Covent Garden, like Drury Lane, occupied a unique, wholly enviable position.

Both were patent theatres.

The patents dated from the time of the Restoration, it will be recalled. Charles II had authorized D'Avenant and Killigrew to form two new companies of players. Originally the two men obtained a joint charter, but split partnership, with an understanding that neither should take advantage of the other, a short time before Killigrew's company, 'The King's,' went to the first Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, which opened in 1663. It was at Drury Lane on an afternoon in 1669 that Charles is reported to have seen Nell Gwynn for the first time and became so enraptured with her that the same evening he carried her off to become his mistress. D'Avenant's company, the 'Duke of York's Company,' was first installed at Salisbury Court Theatre. In 1682 the two companies were united into one. Thirteen years later a third royal patent was granted by William III to Thomas Betterton, Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle, who started their company

at Lincoln's Inn Fields. In 1690, Christopher Rich, variously described as an 'unscrupulous attorney' and 'an old snarling lawyer, a waspish, ignorant petti-fogger, who disregards the rights of all others,' became joint-owner with Killigrew of the patents governing theatrical performances at Drury Lane. Killigrew was then an ageing man, he played an ever smaller part in organizing the company and left most of the work involved to Rich. 'This fellow (Oliver says in *The English Stage*) appears to have revelled in quarrels with his actors, authors, shareholders, in fact with all connected with the theatre. He was rapacious, dictatorial, and dishonest.' Christopher Rich died in 1714, his place being taken by his son John. In 1731, John Rich obtained a lease from the Duke of Bedford, at a ground rent of £100 per annum, to build a theatre on 'a piece or parcel of Ground contiguous to Bow Street and Hart Street and Covent Garden containing in length from East to West one hundred and twenty feet and in breadth from North to South one hundred feet,' and the Lincoln's Inn Fields Company removed to Covent Garden in 1732. At this time, therefore, the right to produce legitimate drama was vested in three companies, two amalgamated into one at Drury Lane, the third at Covent Garden. Five years later, in 1737, an Act of Parliament was passed which prevented the Throne from granting its royal licence to any further companies, placing the two theatres in a highly favourable position.

It is not surprising that the two theatres, instead of sharing their good fortune amicably, became bitter rivals. The quarrel increased with the years. Each management attempted to outbid the other for the services of leading artists of the day, their agents watched the provinces for any new player who showed promise and paid particular attention to those who appeared at that home of excellent players, Smock Alley, Dublin. Each management attempted to outdo the other in the magnificence of its presentations. If one theatre put on a play which proved unsuccessful and the other intended to present the same play, the second production was frequently dropped completely. Few sàcrifices were too great for the managements to make in order to outdo their rival and keep their own position. Their managers were considered a breed apart from ordinary theatrical managers elsewhere, as indeed they were in many respects, and ruled the theatrical world with full knowledge of their prideful position.

It was into this situation that John Kemble had come, the son of a country barn performer who had had to fight not only for his living but to prove himself a good citizen. John had abundant reasons for proving himself the outstanding actor of the period, of maintaining the Kemble family heritage and its newly-found fame, and of paying off his debtors. The new Covent Garden theatre was specifically, uniquely, his theatre. Outside was a façade which gave the new building more than a whiff of culture; inside he obtained a lavish, though genteel opulence. Everything was of the best, the finest he could obtain. Seating accommodation had been improved. The galleries had been moved a few feet nearer to the stage. Decorations were lavish and tasteful. The colour scheme was of a rich dove-grey and gold. Kemble's Covent Garden was a magnificent theatre, so finely done that he soon discovered that he had been overspending and had to continue overspending if it was to be as fine as he wished.

The realization led John to commit a serious error of judgment. Among

many new innovations he introduced was one of a third circle given over entirely to boxes, each with its own ante-room and served by a separate entrance and saloon. A system of renting out private boxes had already been tried out and proven a profitable source of income. John now decided to add to this income by renting out the new tier of boxes, estimating that this would augment the theatre's income by some £11,000 a year. But this sum alone would not pay off the accumulating debts and keep the theatre running profitably, he realized. There had to be some other way of making more money. The only solution he could see was to raise the prices of admission. He decided to increase the price of boxes by a shilling and seats in the pit by sixpence, raising their cost to 7s. for a box and that of a seat in the pit to 4s.

The plan was unpopular. The public, knowing itself master of the theatrical situation, resented being treated in such fashion without having first been asked permission and for no reason which it considered sufficient justification. A political flavour was soon attached to the issue. Fitzgerald, in *The Kembles*, pointed out that those were the days of 'Liberty', when Mr. Fox's supporters, the 'friends of the people', were in fashion, and this exclusiveness, represented by the new boxes, appeared to be utterly opposed to the popular spirit. Thus, there was added to the matter that tone of injured 'morality', which, as long ago shown by Lord Macaulay, hurts the British public. Popular opinion held that these 'un-English' alcoves, with their ante-rooms, were intended to be 'turned to the account of their private vices by a depraved aristocracy.' John was warned of the adverse opinions being passed upon his new system and prices, but chose to ignore them. Had he guessed what was to happen, there can be no doubt that he would have changed them both. But he had no conception of the storm about to burst inside Covent Garden. His experience told him that rumours were always circulating, that any fresh innovation awakened criticism; why should he bother about one more criticism, of whose existence he knew, which he had partly expected; and was confident would disappear without any great fuss?

What neither Kemble, his partners, nor anyone connected to the theatre knew was that Covent Garden was about to witness the greatest riots in the history of the English theatre.

It is interesting to speculate on how a chance disaster which occurred at this time may have affected the issue.

While the new Covent Garden was being built, Drury Lane had burned down for the second time. Sheridan, who was then manager of the Lane company, was commonly believed to be at the end of his tether. It was believed that, unlike Kemble, he would be unable to make the effort to start again. Those who held this opinion said that nothing could save the Lane; even when Sheridan's company transferred to the Lyceum, they believed that Drury Lane Theatre would never be rebuilt. Preliminary reports showed that to rebuild the theatre would cost over £400,000, this figure including the theatre's outstanding debts and purchase of the patents and £50,000 owing to debenture holders of the theatre. When the new Covent Garden theatre opened it was, in the truest sense, the only privileged company operating in its own theatre. Those who prophesied disaster for the Drury Lane company held that Kemble had a unique advantage; he had a new theatre, one which was able to accommodate bigger

audiences than could be housed in the Lyceum, and had sufficient backing to see him through the difficult first months. The Lane company, performing in another theatre, overburdened with debts, surrounded with worry, could not fight such powerful opposition, said the wiseacres.

This was the situation in which the new theatre approached its opening night.

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The date of the opening of the new Covent Garden was 18th September, 1809. The play was *Macbeth*. John Kemble was in the title-role. The house was packed from floor to ceiling. Hundreds of candles illuminated the scene. Footlights—an innovation attributed to Garrick after a tour of France—shone brightly. We can imagine those back-stage peeping at the audience out 'in front' and congratulating themselves on an auspicious beginning. Behind the scenes players assembled to wish each other good fortune on this great occasion; final touches were given to make-up, robes and costumes had a last draping. A hush came over the audience. The National Anthem was sung. As the final note died away John, dressed for his part, came on to the stage to deliver a poetical address. He stepped to the centre of the stage, faced the audience, and opened his mouth to speak.

No word of the address was heard by the audience. The audience let out a howl of rage and execration which is reported to have frightened people outside the theatre and brought startled customers from surrounding taverns and coffee-houses into the street.

In the uproar which followed that first howl no ten consecutive words of the play could be heard. People in the pit jumped to their feet, row after row of them climbed on their seats and, hats clapped firmly on their heads, stood with their backs turned to the stage. John (the newspapers reported later) used 'imploring attitudes' to try to gain a hearing. Without avail. Sarah came on the stage obviously disconcerted by the tumult, but after some initial confusion both she and John got into the flow of their parts. It says much for their determination, as well as revealing the true Kemble spirit, that they went through the play to the bitter end; many modern players, we feel, would have been in tears by the end of the first act. 'The extraordinary was presented,' says Fitzgerald, 'of that great play being acted by such great players, entirely in dumb-show—while, at every lull the fine tones of the great actress were heard distinctly as she calmly pursued her course.' The evening and the play wore on, without any sign of the storm dying down.

John's emotions on that memorable evening may be easily understood. Here he was, on the opening night of the new theatre, surrounded by debts, and faced by the angriest mob he had ever encountered. The situation was filled with ugly possibilities. The smashing of theatres was no new thing. If it were to happen to Covent Garden on this night of all nights, it would mean inevitable ruination. As the evening progressed without any sign of the audience's fury slackening, he realized something had to be done to preserve order; if the audience would not

listen to the soothing voice, it might listen to more direct tones. Something was done.

Two magistrates were ushered on to the stage during an interval and read through what purported to be the Riot Act. The audience replied by howling even louder. Police arrived and arrested some of the more energetic demonstrators. This enraged the audience even more. Outside the theatre large crowds gathered to hear the noise; if they could not witness, at least they could listen to what was happening. In the auditorium the audience continued its demonstration with unabated fury. The passages, vestibule, and lobbies were full of people who had been unable to get inside, packed like sardines and refusing every request to leave.

That was the opening night. It came to an end. The riots did not end so quickly. They continued, raising new life, new strength, as time progressed. The public, the masters, did not like either the box or the new prices. Led by Clifford, a barrister, it had determined to remove the causes for its discontent and was not to be dissuaded.

The 'O.P.' (old prices) riots became the talk of London. Week succeeded week without any sign of their ceasing. Every night the theatre was in an uproar. Placards fluttered in the pit. An O.P. song and dance were composed and performed in the theatre during the play and in the streets outside. Many Londoners wore O.P. badges in their hats during the day. On one night Brandon, the box-office keeper at Covent Garden, arrested Clifford on a charge of inciting a riot, a charge which was dismissed by the judges and was replaced by a successful counter-charge for malicious imprisonment. John made the great error of importing East End bruisers into the theatre to act as chuckers-out; their arrival and actions only inflamed the demonstrators to fresh vigour. Cruikshank did a series of cartoons on the riots; these, as Fitzgerald describes them, presented the whole orgy: the theatre with its pigeon-holes and private boxes, people leaning out, climbing down from one tier to another, fighting, breaking benches, winding horns, springing rattles, and flourishing innumerable placards. 'A coarser, more unmitigated set of ruffians could not be conceived,' wrote Fitzgerald. O.P. medallions were struck in silver and copper; on one side was a relief of Kemble represented as a donkey and ridden by John Bull with the wording 'From N. to O., yes, you must go' and, on the other, the letters 'O.P.' with the association's emblem, a horn and a rattle.

The riots continued for nearly seventy nights, almost three months.

'What a time it has been for us all; beginning with fire and continued with fury,' Sarah wrote to a friend.

Three months later at a O.P. dinner held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, with Clifford in the chair, John appeared and signed a formal treaty with the demonstrators. Under the terms of the treaty it was agreed that private boxes should be reduced to their original number of six; prices in the pit were to be restored to their former level but those of the new boxes could remain as they were; John would make a public apology for having raised the prices; Brandon, the box-office keeper, was to be discharged. From the dinner John went straight on to the stage of the theatre to make his apology; he made an attempt to keep the box-office keeper in the theatre's employ but when the luckless Brandon

appeared on the stage he was greeted with a shower of stones and sticks and had finally to be discharged. (He was re-employed after a few months.) A few days later Kemble made a further public apology for having employed bruisers as chuckers-out, in the course of which he said: 'We are very sorry for what has passed and beg leave to assure you that inclination and duty alike will render it our first pride, for the time to come, to prevent anything of the kind occurring again.' At this a large placard with the words 'We are satisfied' was hoisted in the pit. The fiercest battle of the O.P. riots had ended. But only the fiercest.

In the following September rioting occurred again at the theatre. The masters were wide awake to any possible trickery by their servants. On the opening night of the new season they noted that an additional eight boxes had been kept as well as the six permitted under the terms of the peace treaty. A demonstration began immediately. John had only himself—or, to be more accurate, his financial difficulties—to blame for this attempt to disregard the contract. He came on to the stage pretending to misunderstand the cause for the tumult, and, in an attempt to circumnavigate the situation, offered an explanation of having kept some boxes closed up to 'improve the ventilation'. He walked off the stage and did not reappear that night. The audience were not fooled by this lamentably stupid evasion. There was another outbreak of rioting, accompanied by speeches, songs, sticks, and general confusion. On the following night placards back again, leaflets, verses, cartoons were showered through the theatre, shouts echoed throughout the performance of the play, the O.P. song and dance was performed by a gentleman who climbed down from the boxes into the pit, and, finally, at the end of the fourth act, Kemble made an appearance to ask what was the matter. He was told in no uncertain language by a spokesman for the demonstrators, and later finally promised to abolish the eight boxes.

The result of these famous riots suited the public, then in its most self-righteous mood, but they did not aid the Kembles. John's financial position, never strong, never secure, was weakened for ever. His nerves had suffered, more than those of the rioters, who probably saw the affair as great fun and a vindication of their rights. His health was not too good. He was then well over fifty. And Sarah had already started to moot her intention to retire, an event which he knew would have grave financial consequences for Covent Garden.

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From that time onward affairs at Covent Garden worsened continuously. The public, having won its battle with John, chose to disregard the obligations of victor to vanquished. It was showing more interest in other forms of entertainment.

John, and Sheridan at Drury Lane, had already done much to help this tendency. Neither of them had been above employing animals, infant prodigies, and 'magnificent spectacles' to tempt patrons to Covent Garden and the Lane. Something had to be done to counter Astley's 'grand Oriental spectacles, processions of transparent figures, and most brilliant display of fireworks.' Sheridan once stated that a performing dog, Carlo, had saved Drury Lane from bankruptcy

while it was under his control. John, who had used real soldiers as gentlemen of the ensemble, had also used a full pack of fox-hounds to lend verisimilitude to a stage fox-hunt; he had employed circus troupes and, to enhance the interest in one of his spectacles, had staged a duel on horseback, all at Covent Garden. He it was who introduced Master Betty, 'Betty-boy,' the infant Roscius, to London.

Master Betty had once seen Sarah and threatened to commit suicide unless he was allowed to act immediately. No one stopped him. This nineteenth-century prodigy made his first appearance in Belfast at the age of thirteen; from Belfast he went to Dublin, thence to Scotland, and on to Birmingham where fame and frenzy awaited him; his hotel was besieged, the theatre was mobbed, he himself was chased by an adoring public whenever he appeared. He came to Covent Garden and received fifty guineas a night (this figure is a sign of the ruinous competition carried on between the two patent theatres; Master Betty received fifty guineas a night at the Lane for the first three nights and a hundred pounds for every following night) for playing Romeo, Hamlet, and a quantity of other characters. On his opening night police and a full company of Guards failed to control crowds besieging the theatre. Parliament adjourned in order to attend a performance in which he was appearing; on one afternoon a crowd broke into the theatre, smashed doors and windows, broke the staircases, and is stated to have trampled to death four luckless admirers of the 'infant Roscius.' In twenty-eight performances in London Master Betty earned £4,000; in a year he had amassed the not inconsiderable sum of £30,000 and two years later retired to Cambridge for a classical education, a locality where people can be classical with even less worldly assurance. Betty was admirably youthful at heart: in the summer he wore drawers made from children's handkerchiefs printed as maps. He was, it is said, 'the desire of all feminine eyes'. Kemble had brought Betty to London in 1804 and made money. He had also made money from the dogs that raced across the stage in full cry and disturbed members of the green-room after the show by barking at a scene-shifter carrying a joint of meat; he added eighteenth century ballad lyrics to performances of *The Tempest*. And now, after being forced to revert to old prices and closed boxes, condemned to run the Garden at a loss, he made increasing use of such attractions, attempting to regain on dogs, horses, and acrobats what he lost on the dramas of Shakespeare.

Master Betty reappeared, at twenty-two, gangling, awkward, with a poor voice and classical education. He appeared for a while, then vanished, a failure.

The activities of managements at both patent theatres attracted considerable attention and much condemnation. Many people held that the theatres were abusing their privileges by indulging in what was, in those days, commercialism of the worst order. Already it was being said that good players were being thrown out of work by 'the quadrupeds, whose services could be obtained at a far cheaper rate, and who act in the largest theatre, as there is no necessity for watching their expressive countenances.' This was also the time when Covent Garden and Drury Lane first became friends—they accepted Voltaire's philosophy of 'We are what you might call friends—we have the same enemies'—and Sheridan made indignant denial of widespread rumours that he had aided the O.P. rioters, and also defended Kemble's action in sponsoring spectacles and

quadrupeds at Covent Garden with the peculiar statement that he was sure Kemble would sooner perform on 'his own two legs.' But the public's taste was leading it away from even the mangled versions of Shakespeare's plays which were appearing—*Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* with happy endings, *The Tempest* as a musical—and toward Chinese acrobats, dogs, zebras, and Indian dancers. In a word, the winkle and champagne era was already in labour.

Worse was to happen. In 1812 the new Drury Lane opened, thus ending Covent Garden's short monopoly of privileges, and on June 29th of that year Sarah Siddons, the greatest actress of her day, made her final appearance.

Sarah had been on the stage nearly thirty years. Boaden could no longer say 'the symmetry of her person is exact and captivating; her face peculiarly happy, though strong, and never for an instant seemingly overcharged, like the Italian faces, nor coarse and unfeminine, under whatever impulse.' Her determination, which Fanny Burney noted with some awe, remained unimpaired, but she was no longer young, slim, or eager. She had grown stout with the years, heavy and ponderous. As an actress she had been far above her contemporaries; one critic had said that not only was she the greatest tragic actress but as an artist was above her art, surpassing her rivals in degree and excelling them in kind. Tate Wilkinson, when asked what was a queen, replied: 'Mrs. Siddons.' Byron said her acting ability excelled that of her brother and George Frederic Cooke put together: it was one of Cooke's toes that Kean had brought back from America as a good-luck charm. 'Neither praise nor money depraved her,' said Dr. Johnson. Lord Erskine said: 'Her performance was a school for oratory.' And now her career was over; the greatest money-making actress of the age—in 1803 she had earned £20 a night, in 1811, 50 guineas a night—was leaving the stage.

After an affecting performance as Lady Macbeth, one of her greatest parts, she delivered a poetical address to the audience. The address had been written by Horace Twiss, her nephew, and concluded with the lines:

> 'Judges and Friends! to whom the magic strain
> Of nature's feeling never spoke in vain,
> Perhaps your hearts, when years have glided by,
> And past emotions wake a fleeting sigh,
> May think on her whose lips have pour'd so long
> The charmed sorrows of your Shakespeare's song:—
> On her, who parting to return no more,
> Is now the mourner she but seem'd before,—
> Herself subdued, resigns the melting spell
> And breathes, with swelling heart, her long, her last
> Farewell.'

Leave-takings were solemn affairs in those days, redolent with classical sentiment and premonition of death.

The first two lines, addressed to an audience which must have included some who had participated in the O.P. riots, certainly do sound like the final address of a servant to the masters.

John was now faced with two additional worries. Debts at Covent Garden

were heavy, running expenses were continuous, and he was unable to find any actress whose appeal made any showing beside that of his famous sister. There was only Miss O'Neill, she who 'did not lift the imagination out of itself', was 'absorbed in her suffering' and had 'tears in her voice', charming, with 'a figure of the finest model', and obviously destined to grace the aristocratic home she subsequently acquired by marrying into the peerage. Problems surrounded him and he was an ageing man, troubled with ill health.

Five years later, in 1817, the problems unsolved, John threw up the sponge and retired after a final performance in *Coriolanus*. He had never been really popular; his stiff, autocratic, 'old Roman' temperament had failed to endear him to the public. Nevertheless the theatre was crowded for his final appearance. His final speech was greeted with lengthy applause. Hazlitt, describing the scene, wrote:

'There is something in these partings with old public favourites exceedingly affecting. They teach us the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers are among our earliest recollections—among our last regrets. They are links that connect the beginning and the end of life together, their bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence.'

Times have changed since those years, we may note in passing. The present generation has little chance to feel similarly towards its outstanding players. Their lives are nowadays divided between Shaftesbury Avenue and Broadway. After the first blaze of fame is over most of them migrate to Hollywood, there to make valiant attempts to disguise the shortcomings of 'stars' whose contribution to theatrical fame rests too often on the chance sublimity of their legs and shape of their features, and whose acting ability is a guarantee to oblivion directly their youth and marital affairs no longer intrigue Minnesota, Mukden, and Manchester. We know these older players, we have cause to be abundantly thankful for their presence on the screen, but it is infinitely more difficult to feel the same sense of comradeship to their shadows that our great-grandparents felt for those whose careers had been a source of everyday conversation in their lives. Many thousands of younger cinemagoers unfortunately cannot recall the days when some older players graced the London stage. So they migrate to California. The fault is not theirs. Too few British managements are prepared to utilize the opportunities afforded by lengthy experience. Once their first fame, the newness of names, during which they are hounded and harried to death with offers of work, have been spent, they join the ranks of those who may starve to death or cripple themselves climbing stairs to agents' offices, endure endless privation, for all most managements care, no matter what their ability or how great their experience. Even younger players have endless difficulty to pay their way until somebody suddenly 'discovers' who has been sitting on their office chair for years. The ways of theatre managements are indeed strange, and not only in this country.

Fitzgerald (in his jigsaw-puzzle study of *The Kembles*) is not wholly correct when he says that John's chief reason for going to live abroad after his retirement was on account of his health. True, John's health was not of the best. But it was not the chief reason for his retiring to Toulouse. The outstanding cause was

a need to escape the theatre's creditors. The thousand pounds a year on which he could count would go farther, and in more pleasant fashion, abroad than if he stayed in England where Covent Garden's creditors would only whittle it down. Absence of body. . . . He returned to London for a short visit and then went to Switzerland, where he bought a villa at Lausanne.

John was at Lausanne when he learned that his partner in Covent Garden, Mr. Harris, had died. The news came as an unpleasant shock. It increased his responsibility for the affairs of the theatre. He had no wish to return to England. He was enjoying Switzerland, his creditors were at a safe distance, and his health was easier than in the capricious weather of England. For some days he considered the matter and finally reached a decision. He decided to give his sixth share in Covent Garden, valued at some £50,000, to his brother Charles, who was still in England and still on the stage. In a letter written to Mrs. Inchbold at the time he said:

'Know, dear Muse,
'Tis our fast intent
To shape all cares and business for an age,
Conferring them on younger strength.
In plain prose, I have assigned over my sixth part of the property in absolute fee to my brother Charles, and God give him good wit. When I left you before, dearest, it was to visit Spain, and you managed for me in my absence; now, I think, I shall make out my tour to Italy and end perhaps like an old Roman.'

The visit to Italy killed him. It was bitterly cold in Rome that winter—the Italian winter has not noticeably changed—and his health suffered. The Kembles returned to Switzerland, where, after a succession of strokes, he died on 20th February, 1823. He was buried in the public cemetery on the Berne Road outside Lausanne.

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Charles Kemble, father of Fanny, needed John's pious hope of God-given wit to manage the tangled affairs bequeathed him in his brother's gift. He may well have seen it as an expensive family heirloom which nobody wanted and so was passed into his keeping. Whatever pleasure the gift may have caused cannot have been unmixed with some doubts as to whether it would prove a blessing or a curse.

Charles was some years younger than John Philip. His first performance had been at the opening of Drury Lane on 21st April, 1794. His first role was that of Malcolm. He enjoyed playing roles in which he might display chivalry and gallantry, a *beau geste* in the widening face of industrialism. He was better-looking than his brother; it was said that Apollo 'might have envied his looks' and he was well suited to such parts as Cassio, Faulconbridge ('he came into Angiers with the indolent grace of a tawny lion'), and Mercutio, which, wrote Doran,



THE KEMBLE COVENT GARDEN THEATRE



'Gracious and genteel'
CHARLES KEMBLE as PIERRE

'he made his own . . . in that he walked, spoke, looked, fought, and died like a gentleman.' To Laertes he imparted passion, his Bassanio was marked for grace and dignity; his playing of Mercutio and Petruchio took them back to roles of dignified comedy.

Charles knew nothing of management. He tried to manage Covent Garden, tried hard, with a willing energy, a devotion, intention, and sincerity which characterized his life. Charles did his utmost; that cannot be disputed. From the very beginning, however, a quantity of factors operated against his endeavours. Throughout his career he had been overshadowed by his more famous brother and more famous sister; he did not attract anything like the same following. By 1823, at the age of forty-eight, he had passed the point when he could have made fullest use of his brother's gift. Good players were available, but none made the same appeal as John and Sarah had done, and Drury Lane was finding it easier to produce the money to pay good salaries. There were no outstanding women players; a number of good ones, none of the first or second order, none whom the public accepted with marked enthusiasm. He was a family man; he had a family which, from the modern viewpoint, was large. At the same time that he managed the theatre he had to ensure he did not endanger his home.

Viewed impartially, it is doubtful whether such a gift ever placed such a burden on the receiver's shoulders. The rent of Covent Garden was a staggering amount when seen by those who had to pay it; it amounted to £12,500 per annum. That had to be paid. So had the artistes' salaries; those of the principals reached £50 and over a night, those of the smaller players were from £10 to £30 per night or per week.

Charles tried manfully. He used every wit extended by the Almighty in respect to John's wish, to keep the theatre going and maintain the Kemble name in the theatre. Neither the grace of a tawny lion nor Apollo's envy helped him balance the ledger. Within a very short space of time the fight began to assume ugly, menacing dimensions.

By 1829 the situation had worsened beyond his direst expectations. Solidly, unmistakably. In that year distraint warrants for rates and taxes, amounting to several thousands of pounds, had been issued against the theatre. The bailiffs went in. Charles was away in Ireland when this calamity occurred. Marie-Therese, his wife, was the first to know. She was extremely depressed—not unnaturally; poor woman, her life had been far from easy. Her words to Fanny at the time were: "It has come at last. Our property is to be sold. I have seen that fine building all covered with placards and bills of sale. The theatre must be closed and I know not how many hundreds of poor people will be turned adrift without employment."

That last sentence reveals Mrs. Kemble as a true trouper. The true people of the theatre are never far from knowledge of poverty and what it means. To-day, as then, and throughout the long history of the theatre, there is no more generous or kindly hearted section of the community than the players. Mrs. Kemble's words are the epitome of what the true player feels for his fellow-artistes and those back-stage.

Fanny was extremely worried at her mother's words and at the way she had spoken. That same day she wrote to her father, seeking his permission for her to

find employment as a governess, a position in which she hoped to find sufficient time to indulge her desire to write. That was the chief desire of her life. She wanted to become a dramatist.

Mrs. Kemble consented to Fanny posting the letter to her father. By the same post, however, she herself also wrote to Charles, requesting him not to give Fanny any reply until he returned home. The next day she asked Fanny whether she believed she had any talent for the stage. Her daughter had no thoughts on the matter; she had had none for almost two years. As she herself wrote, her 'former fancy for going on the stage . . . had died away with the sort of moral and mental effervescence which had subsided' during a year she had just spent in Edinburgh. She was in fact opposed to the idea of a stage career.

Fanny has been criticized for her attitude toward the stage, especially by those who choose to ignore the factors which surrounded her life and temperament up to this time. Temperament and knowledge affect each of us. The greatest injustice is done to Fanny when these influences are ignored as having any bearing upon her character.

What was her knowledge of the theatre up to this time? She had been born into it. She had no rosy disregard or ignorance of its miseries. The pride of profession which gained its greatest expression in a pride of family achievement, which had meant so much for Roger and Sally Kemble, for John and Sarah Siddons, cannot be expected to have been necessarily, *a priori*, a major obsession of hers, there was no reason why it should have been. The Kembles had worked, slaved, starved, and died, in their fashion, up the long bitter road from being strollers to becoming the managers of Covent Garden. Other Kembles than Sarah, John, and Charles, were still unsuccessful in their careers. From the time of Roger and his wife onward, the family had risen from the ranks of outcasts to being accepted into the highest circles in London. What had their labours brought them? A measure of fame and unending worry; an ever-present threat of swift return to poverty; education and—as later generations have learned—an understanding that the riches with which education acquainted them might be lost through no failure of their own; a possibility to perform a mangled, bastardized form of Shakespeare to audiences who would, if they were so disposed, prevent his perfections from gaining a hearing, an audience which demanded performing dogs, horses, infant prodigies, to enliven an evening's entertainment; Fanny worshipped Shakespeare. She could scarcely be blamed for not rushing gladly into a theatre where, upon occasion, Juliet's final curtain implied a happy domesticity and ballads, carols, etc., were introduced to try to induce the public to stomach Shakespeare. Fanny disliked the theatre of her period, she disliked the life of the theatre; she did not believe it capable of doing justice to Shakespeare's plays. Her knowledge prevented her from believing in the mystery and glamour which is sensed in the theatre by those outside the ranks. Moreover, she just did not want to go on the stage; she wanted to write. She cannot be blamed for such a wish. It says much for her sincerity and ability that, influenced by these opinions, she was able to act at all.

During the conversation between Fanny and her mother it was suggested she learn a part. She chose Portia. Her mother preferred Juliet. Fanny accepted the suggestion. When Charles returned from Ireland, she gave them an audition.

"Very well—very nice, my dear," was her reward. A few days later Charles took Fanny to Covent Garden to test the strength of her voice in the auditorium.

The decision was made. Fanny was to be brought out in the part of Juliet, in an attempt to give the theatre public a new Kemble, a young woman Kemble, who might restore depleted Kemble fortunes by regaining public interest. She was to succeed the dogs, horses, prodigies, and spectacles, in a bid to save Covent Garden from bankruptcy and to keep the Kemble family in the position its earlier members had striven so hard to attain.

What did she look like, this girl? A number of portraits exist. There is the famous last sketch by Sir Thomas Lawrence (done a few months later), two by Thomas Sully, some pencil sketches, some playbill illustrations. No two portray the same woman.

The only points in common agreement are the thick dark hair parted in the centre and drawn low over the outside limit of the brows, and a general impression of quickness, warmth of character, and near good looks. Part of the latter may be due to flattery by the individual artist. One of the Sully portraits, now in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, shows evidence of having been approached in the grand classical tradition; there is a vague hint at a stately pose, an Irish type of aliveness, flowing robes, and the smoky background beloved of Sir Joshua Reynolds and his imitators. Some artists were apt to sacrifice truth in the interest of kindliness and higher fees from later sitters. No, Fanny was not beautiful. Mrs. Fitzhugh once said to her: "Fanny Kemble, you are the ugliest and handsomest girl in London!" Her looks were greatly influenced by her moods: a not unusual quality in a woman. She could be vivacious and glowing at one moment, and, in the next, dull, apathetic, and pale. Her skin was poor following a youthful bout of smallpox. Her eyes were remarkably fine, large, dark, and bright. Her teeth were good. Of average height, she had acquired at no small anguish to herself 'a flat back, well-placed shoulders, erect head, upright carriage and resolute step,' from training by a sergeant in the Royal Foot Guards.

So much for the girl who went on the stage of Covent Garden on the night of 5th October, 1829, and had been born in Newman Street, off Oxford Road, on 29th November, 1809, the year of the O.P. riots. This was her background. This was the theatre and her reasons for her being on the stage, half-whispering her lines to a fretting audience, the atmosphere in which she was making her début, and the knowledge she had of what might happen if, like Sarah, she failed, or the audience rioted for one reason or another.

But there was more than a girl, a Kemble, or a young actress, on the stage. Fanny was not only an actress and a Kemble. She was an individual.

CHAPTER II

(1)

FANNY remembered nothing of her birthplace in Newman Street when she sat down, 'a disgracefully dress-loving old woman of seventy, one of whose minor miseries is that she can no longer find any lace cap whatever that is either pretty or becoming,' to write the introductory chapters to her first memoirs. She could recall, however, that the next of the many homes which her parents provided their children, was at 'a place called Westbourne Green . . . not far from Paddington Canal,' a locality 'so far out of town that our nearest neighbours . . . were the owners of a charming residence in the middle of park-like grounds.'

Charles and Maria had five children: Philip, who died in infancy; John Mitchell; Fanny; Henry; and Adelaide. The last two were born a few years after the family had moved back to Central London.

Nothing can support a belief that Fanny's childhood was unhappy. It was unsettled, but that in itself was no cause for unhappiness, for the Kembles' home, wherever it was centred, was real and stable in her mind. No, her childhood escaped the disaster of family misery. It encountered instead the more subtle, more insidious part of her being born into a famous family, the foremost in the profession, causing her to be expected to either show early signs of rivalling her relatives or of failing to display even the slightest trait of their brilliance; a black or white existence which denied her even the slightest gradation of hue. Even more subtle, it resounded with her parents' and relatives' fame and introduced her from birth into the ranks of the famous, infamous, and ambitious. There is great danger here for any child, particularly one so independent and intuitive as Fanny.

At Westbourne Green, Fanny showed her first signs of independence. 'At that period of my life, I began,' she wrote:

> 'to be exceedingly troublesome and unmanageable, my principle crime being a general audacious contempt for all authority, coupled with a sweet-tempered, cheerful indifference to all punishment. . . . I never cried, I never sulked, I never resented, lamented, or repented either my ill-doings or their ill-consequences. . . . Being hideously decorated once with a fool's cap of vast dimensions, and advised to hide, not my "diminished head," but my horrible disgrace, from all beholders, I took the earliest opportunity of dancing down the carriage-drive to meet the postman, a great friend of mine, and attract his observation and admiration to my "helmet" which I called aloud upon all wayfarers also to contemplate, until removed from an elevated bank I had selected for this public exhibition of myself and my penal costume. . . .'

Recollections of such incidents may not reveal the future stature of the individual, but they do, when seen as a whole, reflect the atmosphere in which the individual's formative years are passed.

'In short, I was as hopelessly philosophical a subject as Madame Roland, when, at six years old, receiving her penal bread and water with the comment "*Bon pour la digestion*!" and the retributive stripes which this drew upon her with the further observation "*Bon pour la circulation*!" '

A short while later the family moved to another house 'near the churchyard of Paddington Church, a thoroughfare of gravel walks cutting in various directions the green turf, where the flat tombstones formed frequent "play tables" for us. Upon these our nursery maid, apparently not given to melancholy meditations among the tombs, used to allow us to manufacture whole delightful dinner sets of clay plates and dishes (I think I could make such now) out of which we used to have feasts, as we called them, of morsels of cake and fruit.'

From here Fanny went to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Twiss, the former Frances Kemble who married a dramatic critic. The house was in Camden Place, Bath. Frances Twiss reminded Fanny of her aunt Sarah. She had 'great sweetness of voice and countenance and a graceful, refined feminine manner.' Her husband had become more than a critic. He wrote a number of books, including a *Concordance of Shakespeare*, and insisted upon giving his daughters a thorough classical training. They were 'what so few of their sex ever are, really well informed; they knew much, and they knew it all thoroughly; they were excellent Latin scholars and mathematicians, had read immensely and at the same time systematically, had prodigious memories stored with various and well-classed knowledge, and above all were mistresses of the English language, and spoke and wrote it with perfect purity.' Bath was then 'the gayest place of fashionable resort in England' . . . balls, routs, plays, assemblies, the Pump Room, and all the fashionable dissipations of the place, were habitually resorted to by these very 'stylish schoolmistresses.'

Fanny, like most other people connected with the theatre, had a delightful sense of humour, particularly when directed against herself.

'My stay of a little more than a year at Bath had but one memorable event!' she wrote later. 'I was looking one evening, at bedtime, over the banisters, from the upper story into the hall below, with tiptoe eagerness that caused me to overbalance and turn over the rail, to which I clung on the wrong side, suspended like Victor Hugo's miserable priest to the gutter of Notre-Dame, and then fell four stories down on the stone pavement of the hall. I was not killed or apparently injured, but whether I was not irreparably damaged no human being can possibly tell.'

While Fanny had been in Bath her parents had moved to a new home. Her mother's lifelong delight in rearranging the furniture, which she did on every possible occasion, including times when she was worried, so that their homes resembled a never-ending spring-clean, equalled Charles's continual efforts to find a home which suited both Maria's love of the country, his working needs, and the family purse. This move was occasioned because he needed to be nearer to the theatre. It was to rooms in a building known then as Covent Garden

Chambers, later to house the National Sporting Club. One afternoon, on the day Sarah came from retirement to take part in a benefit night for Charles, Fanny gained her first acquaintance with the theatre. Early in the afternoon Charles carried her into the market place and showed her the dense mass of people which filled the whole Piazza in patient expectation of admission to the still unopened doors; years later she could remember 'the appearance of a solemn female figure in black and the tremendous roar of greeting which welcomed her, and must, I suppose, have terrified my childish senses, by the impression I still retain of it; this is the only occasion on which I saw my aunt in public.' That Fanny had the instinct of a writer can be observed, not only from her alertness to atmosphere, her excellent memory, but also from the things which impressed her young mind so strongly that, sixty years later, she could still remember them, as, for example, this appearance of Sarah and how the family sought her young brother Henry when he was lost on one occasion and they hunted through thoroughfares 'thronged with people and choked with carts and waggons, and swarming with blocked-up traffic, which (made) its way to and from the great mart through avenues far narrower and more difficult of access than they are now.' Mrs. Kemble was absent on this occasion, but Charles and 'Aunt Dall' were extremely worried by the boy's disappearance, which was due to a wish to see Piccadilly by himself.

Aunt Dall, an important figure in Fanny's life, was her mother's sister, Adelaide de Camp (or, to give Fanny's own version of it, Decamp). She had been an actress, and worked with Stephen Kemble. Stephen, after his brief appearance at Covent Garden, had become manager of a theatre in Durham and took his company to places like Newcastle and Sunderland. This section of the Kemble family had two young women to take care of, their own daughter Rosalind and her friend, Celia. These girls, Fanny records, 'learned and acted their parts, devised and executed, with small means and great industry, their dresses; made pies and puddings, and patched and darned, in the morning, and by dint of paste and rouge became heroines in the evening.' Later Aunt Dall joined Charles Kemble and his family and remained their faithful companion until death.

In her memoirs Fanny records an amusing story of Liston, a comedian working with Stephen Kemble's company. Mrs. Stephen was waiting in the wings to go on the stage as Ophelia in the mad scene. In those days stage lunatics carried with them a hall-mark of lunacy—lest the audience should fail to recognize insanity when it saw it: a basket of flowers and straw. (In the twentieth-century play *Ladies in Retirement*, this basket became a posy of bullrushes and weeds 'tidied up' from the river-banks by one of the mad sisters.) Mrs. Stephen was about to step on the stage and was working herself into the necessary state of madness when, on her cue line, Liston handed her a basket which contained neither straw nor flowers but a more purposeful harvest of carrots, turnips, onions, leeks, and pot-herbs. Liston was a great humorist back-stage. On another occasion he gave chorister boys walking on in the funeral procession in *Romeo and Juliet* squares of brown paper on which to dry their tears.

Fanny's lifelong hatred of the way in which Shakespeare's plays were mauled is shown clearly in the words with which she refers to the funeral procession:

'The suppression of that very dreadful piece of stage pageantry has at last, I believe, been conceded to the better taste of modern audiences. In my time it was still performed, and an exact representation of a funeral procession, such as one meets every day in Rome, with torch-bearing priests, and bier covered with its black velvet pall, embroidered with skull and cross-bones, with a corpse-like figure stretched upon it, marched around the stage, chanting some portion of the fine Roman Catholic requiem music. I have twice been in the theatre when persons have been seized with epilepsy during that ghastly exhibition, and think the good judgment that has discarded such a mimicry of a solemn religious ceremony highly commendable.'

Throughout the early years Fanny was continually meeting her family's relatives and friends. Almost every relative was connected to the stage. All the Kembles enjoyed stable, devoted family lives. Fanny records that Frances, daughter of Stephen, who became Mrs. Robert Arkwright, her husband being a descendant of the inventor of the spinning jenny, once told her with absolute conviction that 'she thought wives were bound implicitly to obey their husbands, for she believed that at the day of judgment husbands would be answerable for their wives' souls.' Roger and Sally's descendants appear to have taken this weighty guardianship seriously. It was after Frances married Arkwright that Aunt Dall went to live with Charles and his family.

Among the many famous people who visited the Kembles at Covent Garden Chambers was Talma, the French actor. Fanny greeted him at the door and was told to announce Talma, the great French tragedian:

'I replied that I would do so, and then added, with noble emulation, that my father was also a great tragedian, and my uncle was a great tragedian, and we had a baby in the nursery who I thought must be a great tragedian too, for she did nothing but cry.'

Whether the appearance of Talma played any part in the decision we do not know, but within a short time Fanny was sent to a girls' school at Boulogne, 'in the oddly named "Rue Tant perd tant paie",' kept by a Madame Faudier and her daughter, Mademoiselle Flore, 'a bouncing, blooming beauty of a discreet age, whose florid complexion, prominent black eyes, plaited and profusely pomatumed black hair, and full commanding figure, was attired for fête days in salmon-coloured merino.' Fanny was instructed in music, dancing, and Italian, the latter by a Signor Mozzochetti, who had an eye on the impressive Mademoiselle Flore. One day, to escape punishment for failing in her duties, Fanny took a walk over the roof of the house, frightening local citizens by her appearance and sending them rushing to Madame Faudier. "*Ah, ce ne peut-être que cette diablesse de Kemble!*" exclaimed the comprehending mistress.

Then followed an experience which confirmed the occasion when Fanny danced in her idiot's hat. It reveals clearly that her imagination, the single indispensable of both players and writers, was already at work. And to gruesome purpose—a not unnatural state for children and adults in the professions named, who can visualize horror or drama more easily than quietude or humour.

She had been naughty and:

'I was forthwith plunged into the cellar, where I curled myself up on the upper step, close to the heavy door that had been locked upon me, partly for the comfort of the crack of light that squeezed itself through, and partly, I suppose, from some vague idea that there was no bottom to the steps, derived from my own terror rather than from any precise historical knowledge of oubliettes and donjons, with the execrable treachery of stairs suddenly ending in mid-darkness over an abyss. I suppose I suffered a martyrdom of fear, for I remember upwards of thirty years afterwards having this very cellar and my misery in it, brought before my mind (when) reading Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame*.'

Another experience, which she again underwent as punishment, needed no imagination to impress its significance. She was taken to see the guillotine after it had been used. When she arrived the beheading was over, gutters ran red. Fanny never forgot this experience, which she rightly saw as precisely the wrong way to try to subdue highly strung children, for as she says:

'In the nature of many children exists a capacity of terror equalled in its intensity only by the reticence which conceals it.'

When Fanny was nine years old she returned to London, again to a new home, this time at Craven Hill, Bayswater. In the following two years the family, now complete, lived in three different houses in the same locality. 'In those days Tyburnia did not exist; nor all the vast region of Paddingtonian London. Tyburn turnpike, of nefarious memory, still stood at the junction of Oxford Road (Street) and the Edgware Road, and between the latter open fields traversed by the canal, with here and there an isolated cottage dotted about them, stretched on one side of the high road; and on the other the untidy, shaggy, ravelled-looking selvage of Hyde Park, not trimmed with shady walks and flower borders and smooth grass and bright iron railings as now, but as forbidding in its neglected aspect as the desolate stretch of unenclosed waste on the opposite side.' In those days Craven Hill had some twenty houses on it and faced a meadow. The houses were large and stood in their own grounds. 'Even the most modest of them had pretty gardens in front and behind, and verandas and balconies with flowering creepers and shrubberies, and a general air of semi-rurality that cheated my poor mother (who detested London) with a make-believe effect of being, if not in the country, at any rate out of town.' The country atmosphere was enhanced by the surroundings. Opposite stood 'a row of very fine elm trees separated only by the carriage-road from the houses. The windows looked through the branches upon the large, quiet, green meadow, and beyond that to an extensive nursery garden of enchanting memory, where our weekly allowances were expended in pots of violets and flower-seeds and roots of future fragrance, for our small gardens; this pleasant foreground divided us from the Bayswater Road and Kensington Gardens. At the back of the houses and their grounds stretched a complete open of meadow land, with hedgerows and elm trees, and hardly any building

in sight in any direction.' Later generations may well say 'Gone, alas, like our dreams, too soon.' Amongst the Kembles' neighbours at Craven Hill was a sister of Beau Brummel; Latour, the composer; and Belsoni, whom Fanny refers to as 'The Egyptian traveller.' Belsoni was quite an interesting character. He had performed feats of strength at Astley's and later became the spiritual forerunner of de Lesseps, by inventing an hydraulic machine to regulate the Nile. He it was who was responsible for sending the bust of Rameses II to the British Museum. He was the first to enter the second pyramid of Giza, the first European to find the oasis of Baharia, and among other deeds opened the sepulchre of Sati I. He died attempting to reach Timbuktu, in 1823. He must have found London equally difficult to journey across, for, as Fanny wrote: 'Omnibuses were no part of London existence then; a hackney coach (there were no cabs, either four-wheelers or hansoms) was a luxury to be thought of occasionally.'

No wonder that Charles, who generally walked the five miles back from Covent Garden to Craven Hill at night, found his unexpected strolling tiring and set about finding another place nearer the theatre. Ultimately space was taken at a lodging-house in Gerard Street, Soho, though the house at Craven Hill was kept on. It was here that John Philip visited them when he came on his short visit from Lausanne.

The occasion for John's visit was to make over his share in Covent Garden to Charles. In her memoirs Fanny herself gives the lie to Fitzgerald's order of reasons for John's living abroad. With characteristic bluntness she says that her uncle was 'compelled to live abroad, under penalty of seeing the private fortune he had realized by a long life of hard professional labour swept into the ruin which had fallen upon Covent Garden Theatre, of which he was part-proprietor.' She always associated this last recollection of him, an ageing man with 'venerable white hair and beautiful face', with what was to happen to Charles when he took on the theatre, 'that luckless property, which weighed like an incubus upon my father all his life.' Nevertheless Charles received the property 'with cheerful courage and not without sanguine hopes of retrieving its fortune.' The matter settled, John Kemble returned to Lausanne, leaving Covent Garden to Charles and the hope of God-given wit. He never returned to England, nor did Fanny ever see him again.

While the family was living in central London, Fanny was taken to a place of amusement for the first time. The place chosen for the occasion was Astley's Amphitheatre. Fanny was then seven years old. The spectacle she found at Astley's held as great a delight for her as it did for any child. There was a nice lot of blood, a lot of thunder and some gaiety:

'We saw a Highland horror called *Meg Murdoch, or the Mountain Hag*, and a mythological after-piece called *Hyppolita, Queen of the Amazons*, in which young ladies in very short and shining tunics, with burnished breastplates, helmets, spears, and shields, performed sundry war-like evolutions round her Majesty Hyppolite, who was mounted on a snow-white *live* charger. In the heat of action some of these fair warriors went so far as to die, which martial heroism left an impression on my imagination so deep and delightful as to have proved hitherto indelible.'

As a result of this visit Fanny, with her brothers and sister, performed their

first play, *Ambroso, King of Little Britain*, in front of their parents and a few friends, including Liston and his wife (who acted the part of Ambroso and Coquetinda on the stage).

While at Craven Hill, Mrs. Whitelock arrived to live with the family. She had been the Elizabeth Kemble who married a theatrical manager, went to America, and returned a widow. A taller and larger woman than Mrs. Siddons, she had deep and vehement gestures, light grey eyes and a light auburn wig. When told her wig was awry she would say "Oh, is it?" and push it across to a crooked position on the other side of her head. In conversation she was addicted to slapping her thigh forcibly and exclaiming "I declare to God!" or "I wish I may die!" Charles called her Queen Bess. She arrived in London with anecdotes of General Washington, Talleyrand, and of how an Indian brave had followed her one evening through the streets of Philadelphia.

Writing of these times later, Fanny gave this estimate of herself: 'I had no masters, and my aunt Dall could ill supply the want of other teachers. Moreover, I was extremely troublesome and unmanageable, and had become a tragically desperate young person, as my determination to poison my sister, in revenge for some punishment which I conceived had been unjustly inflicted upon me, will prove.' On one occasion, after being reprimanded by aunt Dall, she decided to run away. There was a temptation, at the time, to drown herself in a convenient pond but 'it was thickly coated with green slime studded with frogs' heads, and looked uninviting,' so she started to stroll to London. She stopped at a cottage for bread and butter to sustain her for the journey and was found there by aunt Dall and taken home. For this 'I expiated my offence by a week of bread and water and daily solitary confinement in a sort of tool-house in the garden.'

(2)

From London, Fanny set off to France again, this time to a school in Paris, in the Rue d'Angoulême, off the Champs-Elysées. The school was well-patronized by the children of English parents. Among earlier pupils at the school had been Mary Russell Mitford and Lady Caroline Lamb.

Miss Mitford was an interesting, important character. The daughter of a doctor, she spent the majority of her life in country towns and villages on the borders of Berkshire and Hampshire. She wrote a number of plays, stiff ornate works bursting with shoddy grandeur and lavish temperament, and a quantity of stilted poetry, unimaginative and cramped into a garment she never wore easily. Her plays were successful in their age but have passed from knowledge; even her *Rienzi*, *Foscari*, the inevitable *Mary Queen of Scots* and *Charles the First*, have been forgotten, but she wrote one of the great classics of English literature: *Our Village*. This magnificent work, which establishes her as the forerunner of Richard Jeffries, the Wiltshire writer, has no equal for the picture it gives of English rural life in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Fanny met Miss Mitford some years later, when she was having consultations with Charles on producing *Foscari* at Covent Garden.

In her memoirs Fanny includes an anecdote of Lady Caroline Lamb which

most of Byron's biographers appear to have overlooked while recounting his entanglement with that eccentric young woman whom Sheridan, on his deathbed, threatened to haunt when he became a disembodied spirit, assuring her that his eyes would always be looking up at her through the lid of his coffin.

Charles and Maria had met Lamb and his wife some years before at a dinner at Lord Holland's house in Paris. The two families occupied rooms at the same hotel and on the return journey the Kembles observed Lamb carrying his wife over the *ruisseau* from the carriage to the hotel door; a spectacle greeted with feminine approval by Mrs. Kemble and by Charles with the remark: "If you were my wife, I'd put your ladyship in the gutter." The sitting-rooms of both suites faced each other and later that night the Kembles witnessed another scene between the couple. At the dinner it had been announced that Byron was expected to arrive in Paris, whereupon Lady Caroline announced her intention of staying in the French capital until the poet arrived. Lamb appears to have met this announcement with what was for him an unusual determination in dealing with his wife. That evening the Kembles had a bird's-eye view of Lady Caroline perched on the arm of her husband's chair with her arm round his neck, later kneeling at his feet as though begging, but, when he got to his feet without answering her pleas, she also stood up and proceeded to fly round the room hurling cups, saucers, plates, vases, candlesticks—Fanny named it as 'the whole cabaret'—on the floor in her rage.

One of the most interesting aspects of Fanny Kemble's memoirs is the way in which she gives the lie to so many present-day fallacies upon temperament. Here we read of loyal families in the theatre and disloyalty among non-theatrical people. Here we find young actresses sewing and baking before they go on the stage, while ladies of the aristocracy behave in a temperamental fashion popularly regarded as the sole prerogative of young actresses.

Fanny met Lamb some years later, when he had become Lord Melbourne and was Prime Minister. 'He was,' she says, 'exceedingly handsome, with a fine person verging toward the portly, and a sweet countenance, more expressive of refined, easy, careless good humour than almost any face I ever saw.' Melbourne's early marital experiences would seem to have stood him in good stead when dealing with the young Victoria and her royal whims. He was Fanny's beau-ideal of an Epicurean philosopher.

One of the things Fanny had to do in Paris was to go to church. 'We were taken every Sunday either to the chapel of the Embassy or to the Eglise de l'Oratoire (French Protestant worship), to two and sometimes to three services. Sunday was no day of rest to us, as we were required to write down from memory the sermons we had heard in the course of the day and read them aloud at our evening devotional gathering.' Two of Fanny's biographers have regarded this training as having been responsible for her excellent memory. It may have played a part in giving memory tongue, but she came from a family blessed with good memory, and, as we have seen from her initial excursion in performing plays with her brothers and sister, had already commenced to develop her own. It would seem more likely that the significance of this event lay in the necessity to read the sermons aloud. The fact of repeating sermons to her fellow-pupils

provided her first personal experience of the power of the human voice in recitation.

Such an opinion is strengthened by her comments upon languages. She came from a family which delighted in the study of language, 'grammar was favourite light reading.' All of them spoke at least one foreign language with comparative ease. Her uncle John had been a good classical scholar—not surprising after his excursions into Homer—and read French, Italian, and Spanish. Her father spoke English, Latin, and French. Her mother spoke French and German. Her brother John had smatterings of most European tongues, though he failed to master them and could not even speak German after being curator of the museum at Hanover for several years, husband of a German wife, and with such friends as the Grimm brothers and other German literary figures. 'I have learned Latin, English, French, Italian, and German grammer,' she tells us in her memoirs, adding that she did not know a single rule of construction in any language. Purists may protest that one must have a knowledge of grammar to lay claim to speaking a language, but this is seldom true in one's experience.

Another experience of a religious nature during her second stay in France may well have influenced Fanny later when she went on the stage. One of the girls, a French pupil, died. The other girls were called to participate in the final ceremonies. 'She was followed to her grave by the whole school, dressed in white, and wearing long white veils fastened round our heads with white filets. On each side of the bier walked three young girls, pall-bearers, in the same maiden mourning, holding in one hand long streamers of broad white ribbon attached to the bier, and in the other several white narcissus blossoms.' She may have recalled this during her performance as Juliet; the association of the real with the represented always added to her dislike for the mangling of Shakespeare then fashionable.

Amid her studies Fanny got to know her companions and to see a good deal of Paris. On some occasions she was accompanied by Charles, who, a devoted father, made trips across to visit her. He took her to the cafés and theatres, galleries and churches. 'Pleasant days of joyous camaraderie and flanerie ! in which everything, from being new to me, was almost as good to my indulgent companion.'

In the last year of her stay in Paris came news of John Kemble's death at Lausanne and Byron's at Missolonghi, but a more personally important event had occurred the previous year.

The school at which she was a pupil made a feature of presenting performances of plays acted by the students. In one of these Fanny received her first damper as an actress. The play was Racine's *Andromaque*. Fanny took the role of Hermione. The audience which gathered to witness the performance was so imposing that the unfortunate girls lost their voices, swallowed raw eggs to clear their throats and were promptly sick. After the performance Mrs. Rowden, principal of the school, told Fanny: "My dear, I don't think your parents need ever anticipate your going on the stage; you would make a poor actress." 'And,' adds Fanny with typical honesty, 'she was right enough. I did make a poor actress, certainly, though not for want of natural talent for the purpose but for want of cultivating it with due care and industry.'

At this stage in her memoirs comes the first clear statement of Fanny's dislike to becoming an actress. It was contradicted in the letters she wrote a few years later, but that was at a time when she knew she had no alternative.

'With this performance of *Andromaque*, however, all such taste, if it ever existed, evaporated, and though a few years afterwards the stage became my profession, it was the very reverse of my inclination. I adopted the career of an actress with as strong a dislike to it as was compatible with my exercising it at all.'

(3)

The years in Paris over, Fanny returned to England, to Weybridge, 'a straggling little village on the edge of a wild heath,' where her parents had moved in another of their attempts to find a suitable home for both Charles and Maria-Therese in the same locality. Maria was only too happy in her new small cottage. Charles was not. He arrived down at the village after the performance at the theatre on Saturday nights and returned to London on Monday mornings, where he lived at 5 Soho Square, another new house for the family.

Life in the English country-side in those days (1824) still had its primitive aspects. 'Our cottage was the last decent dwelling on that side of the village. Between ourselves and the heath and pine wood was one miserable shanty, worthy of the poorest potato patch in Ireland. It was inhabited by a ragged ruffian . . . whose small domain we sometimes saw undergoing arable processes by the joint labour of his son and heir, a ragged ruffian some sizes smaller than himself, and of a half-starved jackass, harnessed to the plough he was holding. Occasionally the team was composed of the quadruped and a tattered and fierce-looking female biped, a more terrible object than even the man and boy and beast whose labours she shared.'

In fairness to Fanny, it should be remembered that in her description of these unfortunate people she is only using words in common usage in her age, words lacking the prideful, snobbish implication ascribed to them by later generations.

In Weybridge at this time we can see her maturing. She was fifteen years old. She had become a 'fanatical' angler and developed the love for the loneliness of the country which never left her. She delighted in getting away from all human companionship for hours on end, in trudging over the heath or through the pines, wandering along beside the river, accompanied only by her thoughts. Most young people encounter such a time. Fanny had abundant things to think about. She was reading, not easily, not lightly, but hard, furiously, progressively. Her mind was developing—inevitably, far ahead of the experience her age and generation allowed. She commenced her literary studies with La Motte Fouque, Tieck, Wieland, Goethe, in French or English. These authors were followed by a more heterogenous collection; Jean Paul Richter, Carlyle (whose *Sartor Resartus* she found 'in both matter and manner' to bear more resemblance to 'the great German Incomprehensible than anything in the English language'), and others.

She had also started to write: 'I now commenced the still more objectionable practice of scribbling verses without stint or stay; some, I suppose, in very bad

Italian, and some, I am sure, in most indifferent English; but the necessity was on me and perhaps an eruption of such rubbish was a safer process than keeping it in the mental system might have proved. In the meantime this intellectual effervescence added immensely to the pleasure of my country life, and my long rambling walks in that wild, beautiful neighbourhood.' Occasionally she joined in her brothers' sports. One of these, in which she partook 'with more satisfaction (than in cricket) was pistol-shooting at a mark; I had not a quick eye but a very steady hand, so that with a deliberate aim I contrived to hit the mark pretty frequently. I liked this quiet exercise of skill better than that dreadful watching and catching of cannonballs at cricket.'

It was a significant age, the year when childhood ended and she could glimpse the first excited, crowded, enthralling, and, ultimately, frightening opportunities and responsibilities of maturity. With her then, as with all, up to that age her her thinking had been done for her. Responsibility had always lain with others. The rut of family custom and prejudice had engulfed her and now she could see sufficient above the edges to wish to be free. For a girl of Fanny's temperament it must have been a difficult time, particularly with so many new thoughts from so many writers added to her perplexities of growing.

Life was not without its more depressing experiences. One of these occurred the following year when she contracted smallpox. Her sister had it a short while before, and the village doctor had mistaken it for chicken-pox. She was then, she wrote when an old woman, 'a very pretty-looking girl, with fine eyes, teeth, and hair, a clear vivid complexion, and rather good features.' This vanity can be forgiven in an old woman. 'The smallpox did not affect my three advantages first named, but, besides marking my face very perceptibly, it rendered my complexion thick and muddy and my features heavy and coarse, leaving me so moderate a share of good looks as quite to warrant my mother's satisfaction in saying, when I went on the stage, "Well, my dear, they can't say we have brought you out to exhibit your beauty.' Plain I certainly was, but I by no means always looked so. I am sure, if a collection were made of the numerous portraits that have been taken of me, nobody would ever guess any two of them to be the likeness of the same person.'

She had a bad deportment. 'I stooped, slouched, and poked, stood with one hip up and one shoulder down, and exhibited an altogether disgracefully ungraceful carriage, which greatly afflicted my parents.' Such a carriage would have won her the title of a great beauty if she had appeared at some functions a hundred years later. Various methods were tried out to help her gain a better stance. 'Among others, a hideous engine of torture of the backboard species, made of steel covered with red morocco, which consisted of a flat piece placed on my back and strapped down to my waist with a belt, and secured at the top by two epaulettes strapped over my shoulders. From the middle of this there rose a steel rod or spine with a steel collar which encircled my throat and fastened behind. This, it was hoped, would eventually put my shoulders down and my head up, and in the meantime I had the appearance of a young woman walking about in a portable pillory.' This aid to beauty proved of no value and was discarded. 'I was placed under the tuition of a sergeant of the Royal Foot Guards, who undertook to make young ladies carry themselves well and walk well, and not exactly like grenadiers,

either.' Finally, 'thanks to his instructions, I remained endowed with a flat back, well-placed shoulders, an erect head, upright carriage and resolute step.'

During this period Fanny's education proper had come to a standstill. Mercifully, it would seem; the search for beauty could have left her with little energy. There were only singing and pianoforte lessons, to occupy what remained of her time.

Horace Twiss, Fanny's cousin, and his wife were among the family's chief friends while they were in Weybridge. Horace was a man of great good humour. On one occasion while arguing with Fanny's mother as to whether a mutual woman friend had gone somewhere or not, he ended the discussion by saying: "Yes, yes, she did. A woman will go anywhere, at any time, with anybody, to see anything—especially in a gig." The vehicle has changed, the truth remains. Horace was the son of the Frances Kemble who kept the boarding-school in Bath. He married one of his mother's pupils, a Miss Searle, whom Fanny described as 'the smallest woman that I have ever seen.' There is a charming story about them. Mrs. Twiss enjoyed sitting beside her husband, sewing, when he studied law papers. Fanny's mother once commented to Horace that his wife's conversation must have disturbed him. "Oh, she doesn't talk," replied Horace, "but I like to hear the scissors fall." The Twisses' daughter married Bacon, editor of *The Times*, and, when he died, married John Delane, his successor in that august post. Upon this Horace commented, with characteristic humour, that his daughter "took *The Times* and the *Supplement* too."

At this time the affairs at Covent Garden commenced to loom more importantly, a darkening cloud upon the family's horizon.

In Fanny's own words:

> 'I began to be aware of the ominous distresses and disturbances connected with the affairs of the theatre, that were to continue and increase until the miserable subject became literally the sauce to our daily bread; embittering my father's life with incessant care and harassing vexation; and of haunting apprehension of that ruin which threatened us for years, and which his most strenuous efforts only delayed, without averting it.
>
> 'The proprietors were engaged in a lawsuit with each other, and finally one of them threw the whole concern into Chancery, and for years that dreary Chancery suit seemed to envelop us in an atmosphere of palpitating suspense or stagnant uncertainty and to enter as an inevitable element into every hope, fear, expectation, resolution, event, or action of our lives.
>
> 'How unutterably heart-sick I became of the very sound of its name and how well I remember the expression on my father's careworn face one day as he turned back from the door, out of which he was going to his daily drudgery at the theatre, to say to my aunt, who had reproached him with the loss of a button from his rather shabby suit, "Ah, Dall, my dear, you see it is my Chancery suit." '

A very important event happened in Fanny's life at this time. Some time after John Kemble's death, his wife Pop returned to Britain and went to live at a farm in Hertfordshire, on Lord Essex's estate at Cassiobury Park. Pop invited

Maria and Fanny to visit her. During a second visit there Fanny met Harriet St. Leger.

(4)

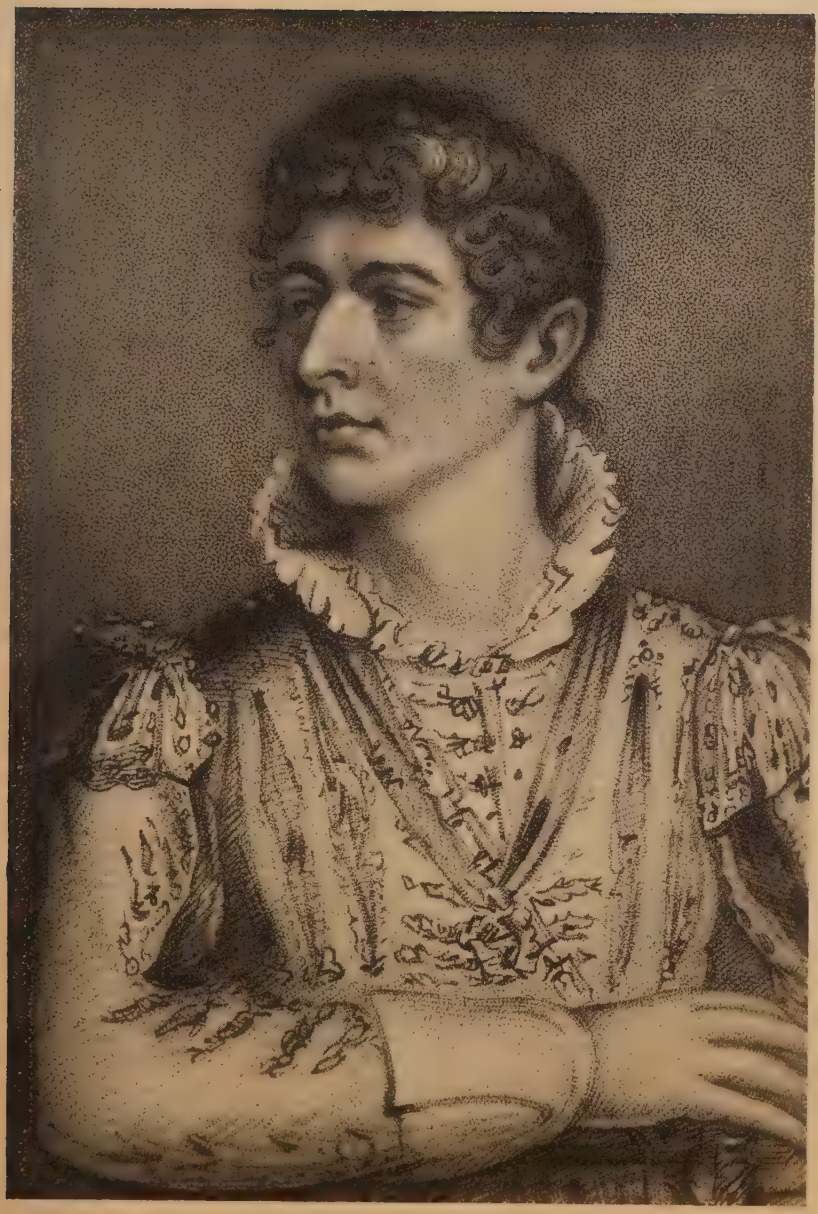
Harriet St. Leger is the friend to whom the majority of Fanny's famous letters were addressed. These letters cover a period of over forty years. In number they originally amounted to thousands. The vast majority of these letters no longer exist. Most of them were deliberately destroyed by Fanny after Harriet returned them for Fanny's use when she was writing her memoirs. Reasons will become apparent for presuming that many will never be found.

Fanny was now eighteen. Harriet was twelve years older. She had been a friend of both John and Pop for some years. At thirty she was 'tall and thin, her figure wanted roundness and grace, but it was straight as a dart . . . her forehead and eyes were beautiful.' Her hair was thick, short, and worn round her head in chestnut-coloured curls. Her eyes were grey, limpid and bright. The rest of her features were not handsome though her teeth were the most perfect Fanny ever saw. She had a habit of wearing thick misshapen shoes of masculine pattern. 'She wore no colours, black and grey being the only shades I ever saw her in. Her dress, bare and bald of every ornament, was literally only a covering for her body. It was difficult to find cashmere fine enough for her scanty skirts or cloth perfect enough for her short spencers, or lawn clear and exquisite enough for her curious collars and cuffs of immaculate freshness.'

Difficulties arise directly we try to find reliable material about Harriet. She lived at Ardgillan Castle, a country house on a hill near the Mourne Mountains, where Fanny visited her in later years. Harriet's ancestors may have included the Sir William St. Leger who was pardoned by James I, for his part in the 'fight of the earls' and was granted lands in Ireland; and Sir William's great-grandfather, Sir Anthony St. Leger, who had been lord deputy of Ireland by commission of Henry VIII. Of Harriet herself, what she was like, her thoughts, her life, there is little reliable information.

Fanny formed a lifelong friendship with Harriet. Such friendships were not uncommon in that century. What is unique about their relationship is that they seldom met, were for years divided by half the world, yet it was to Harriet that Fanny revealed herself more than to any other living person. It was a century when many friendships were cemented and continued solely through correspondence; there was that between Tchaikovsky and Nadeja von Meck, to name only one. Some of the world's more sensitive souls, in need of some patient friends to whom they can confide their thoughts—usually, it may be imagined, in order to sort themselves out—find such a relationship infinitely more valuable than one with people with whom they are in daily contact. Fanny was in this category. There is little of herself which she did not tell Harriet. A candour, a nakedness, a supreme honesty of self, is to be found in the letters she wrote the older woman.

At Heath Farm the two women spent much time in each other's company. 'We walked and talked together the live-long day and a good part of the night,' Fanny recalled. There were few subjects they failed to cover. They were not to



'That high old Roman look'
CHARLES KEMBLE



'Once Cupid under a glass cover'
MRS. CHARLES KEMBLE (MARIE DECAMP)

meet again until Fanny had become famous. She returned to London having made a friendship which was to have great bearing on her future.

Among events at Covent Garden at this time was the London production of *Der Freischütz* (like her brother John, Fanny encountered some difficulty in spelling German; she gives it as *Der Freyschutz*), a few years after the waltz had captured London, sweeping through the fashionable salons, the ballrooms, theatres where it could be used, and the dance-halls. The opera was a success from the moment the first bars of the waltz swelled into the theatre. Charles was so impressed by the public's interest and the box-office receipts that he suggested to Weber that the latter should compose an opera especially for Covent Garden. He agreed to pay Weber £1,000. The subject selected was a treatment of Wieland's *Oberon*. Weber came to London and, with Sir George Smart, resident conductor of the theatre's orchestra at the time and at whose home he stayed, spent much time at Charles's London house during rehearsals of *Oberon*.

Fanny possessed great ability in summing up a person's character, appearance, and life work, in a few words. Her sketch of Weber has never been equalled:

'He was erratic and irregular, and an extraordinary hard worker, and died in middle age. He left to the world a mass of compositions of the greatest variety and beauty, and a name which ranks among the most eminent in his pre-eminently musical country. He was a little thin man, lame on one foot, and with a slight tendency to a deformed shoulder. His hollow, sallow, sickly face bore an expression of habitual suffering and ill health, and the long hooked nose, salient cheekbones, light prominent eyes and spectacles, were certainly done no more than justice to in the unattractive representation of my cherished portrait of him. He had the air and manner of a well-born and well-bred man of the world, a gentle voice, and a slow utterance in English, which he spoke but indifferently and with a strong accent; he generally conversed with my father and mother in French.'

Fanny records that having heard Braham, the singer, render the ballad 'Blue Bonnets over the Border,' Weber exclaimed, "*Ah, cela est bête!*"

Oberon failed. Fanny's account of it is that it was successful 'but in a degree so far below the sanguine expectations of all concerned, that failure itself, though more surprising, would hardly have been a greater disappointment than the result achieved at such a vast expenditure of money, time, labour.' The truth was that the public had over-acclaimed *Der Freischütz* and, while willing to hear a successor, had already determined it could not be as good.

Weber himself died soon after the opera was produced. The lung disease he had already contracted, aided by the English climate, killed him less than six months after an old friend, surprised at seeing a crowd gathered to welcome him, had said, "Weber, are you a celebrity?"

Fanny started to concentrate upon writing more ambitious pieces. At her aunt's farm one afternoon she had come upon Wraxall's *Memoirs of the House of Valois*. This work so impressed her that she determined to write an historical novel, 'of which the heroine should be Francoise de Foix, the beautiful Countess de Chateaubriand.' She set to work, concentrating upon initial preparations for a novel.

It was from this time that there dates the first known letter written by Fanny

to her friend. Previous letters had been written but no longer exist, probably destroyed because their author thought they lacked interest.

It was written to Harriet, who had returned to Ireland, when Fanny was seventeen and was dated from Bayswater in May 1827, two years before Fanny went on the stage.

'Dear Harriet,

'I fear you will think me forgetful and unkind in not having answered your last letter; but if you do, you are mistaken—nor ungrateful, which my silence, after the kind interest you have taken in me and mine, seems to be. But when I tell you that besides the many things that have occupied my mind connected with the present situation of our affairs, my hands have been full of work nearly as dismal as my thoughts—mourning—you will easily understand and excuse the delay.

'Do not be alarmed. The person for whom we are in black has been so little known to me since my childhood, was so old and infirm, and so entirely cheerful, resigned, and ever desirous of leaving this world, that few, even of those who knew and loved him better than I did, could, without selfishness, lament his release. Mr. Twiss, the father of my cousin Horace, is dead lately; and it is of him that I speak. He has unfortunately left three daughters, who, though doing well for themselves in the world, will now feel a sad void in the circle of their home interests.

'And now, dear Harriet, for myself, or ourselves, rather; for as you may well suppose, my whole thoughts are now taken up with our circumstances.

'I believe in my last I told you pretty nearly all I knew, or indeed any of us knew, of our affairs. The matter is now much clearer, and not a whit pleasanter.

'It seems that my father, as proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre, in consequent of this lawsuit and the debts which encumber the concern, is liable at any time to be called upon for twenty-seven thousand pounds, which, for a man who cannot raise five thousand, is not a pleasant predicament. On the other hand, Mr. Harris, our adversary, and joint proprietor with my father, is also liable to enormous demands, if the debts should be insisted upon at present.

'The creditors have declared that they are entirely satisfied that my father, and Messrs. Forbes and Willett, the other partners, have done everything with respect to them which honourable men could do, and offer to wait till some compromise can be made with Mr. Harris, who, it is thought, will be willing to enter into any agreement rather than be irretrievably ruined, as we must all be unless some agreement take place between the proprietors. In the meantime, the lawyers have advertised our party to appeal from the decision of the Vice-Chancellor. Amid all their perplexity and trouble, we have had the satisfaction of hearing that John and Henry [Fanny's brothers] are both doing well, full of affection and kindness to us all. I wish you could have seen my father's countenance as he read it, and with what fondness and almost gratitude he kissed dear Henry's name, while the tears were

standing in his eyes. I cannot help thinking sometimes that my father deserved a less hard and toilsome existence.

'He has resolved that come what may, he will keep those boys at their respective schools, if he can by any means compass it; and if (which I fear is the cause) he finds Bury St. Edmunds too expensive, we shall remove to Westminster, in order that Henry's education may not suffer from our circumstances. Last Thursday was my father's benefit, and a very indifferent one, which I think is rather hard, considering that he really slaves night and day, and every night and every day in that theatre. Cecilia Siddons and I have opened a poetical correspondence; she writes very prettily indeed. Perhaps, had she not had such a bad subject as myself to treat of, I might have said more of her verses. You will be sorry to hear that not only my poor mother's health, but what is almost as precious, her good spirits, have been dreadfully affected by all her anxiety; indeed, her nerves have been so utterly deranged that she has been alternately deaf and blind, and sometimes both, for the last fortnight. Thank Heaven she is now recovering!'

The letter ends with the usual expression of good will and the words, 'Yours affectionately, Fanny.'

Later in the same month Fanny was writing:

'Of our affairs I know nothing, except that we are going to remove to Westminster, on account of Henry's schooling, as soon as we can part with this house [that at Craven Hill].

'You will be glad to hear that my mother is a great deal better, though still suffering from nervousness. . . .'

Referring to the times spent together at Pop's farmhouse, she adds:

'At this time, when the hawthorn is all out and the nightingales are singing, even here, I think of the quantities of may we gathered for my wreaths, and the little scrap of the nightingale's song we used to catch on the lawn between tea and bedtime. I have been writing a great deal of poetry—at least I mean it for such, and I hope it is not all very bad, as my father has expressed himself surprised and pleased at some things I read him lately.'

In the following month the family struggle had grown even worse. After referring to a query on progress on her proposed novel and translation of Sismondi's *History*, 'the former may, perhaps, be finished some time these next six years; the latter is, and has been, in Dr. Malkin's hands ever since I left Heath Farm,' Fanny tells Harriet:

'We are really going to leave this pleasant place, and take up our abode in Westminster; how I shall regret my dear little room, full of flowers and books, and with its cheerful view. *Enfin il n'y faut plus penser.* I have, luckily, the faculty of easily accommodating myself to circumstances, and though sorry to leave my little hermitage, I shall soon take root in the place.'

An undated letter written shortly afterwards refers to the effect which affairs at Covent Garden were having on Charles:

'My father left us last night in very bad spirits. I never saw him so depressed and feared that my poor mother would suffer to-day from her anxiety about him. . . . I suspect this will be the last summer we shall spend at Weybridge, as we are going to give our cottage up, I believe. . . . My mother and myself had yesterday a serious, and to me painful, conversation on the necessity of not only not hating society, but tolerating and mixing in it. She and my father have always been disinclined to it, but their disinclination has descended to me in the shape of an active dislike, and I feel sometimes inclined to hide myself, to escape sitting down and communing with my fellow-creatures after the fashion that calls itself social intercourse. I can't help fancying (which, however, may be a great mistake) that the hours spent in my own room reading and writing are better employed than if devoted to people and things in which I feel no interest whatever, and do not know how to pretend the contrary.'

Later in the same year she was to tell Harriet that her father had gone to act in Paris and she was writing a play which the theatre would buy, if it proved acceptable, for £200, 'the price Miss Mitford's *Foscari* brought her' and that Charles had offered to help sell it to a bookseller [in those days it was a common practise for booksellers to be their own publishers, printing a book at their own expense or on money found by the author].

This letter concludes:

'Fifty pounds is the very utmost that any bookseller would give for a successful play, *mais en revanche*, by selling my play to the theatre it cannot be read or known as a literary work, and as to make a name for myself as a writer is the aim of my ambition, I think I shall decline his offer. My dearest Harriet, this quantity about myself and my pursuits will, I am afraid, appear very egotistical to you, but I rely on your unchangeable affection for me to find some interest in what is interesting me so much.

'Always your most affectionate,

'FANNY.'

Kean, Macready, Young, and Charles Kemble all visited Paris for the purpose of enacting Shakespeare to French audiences. Fanny herself notes that no very eminent actress accompanied them, foremost amongst them being Miss Smithson.

Harriet Smithson had been brought from Ireland to London with the hope that she might prove a second Miss O'Neill. The hope had failed to materialize. London audiences found her beautiful but dull. The *News* critic found her frigid, vulgar, and wanting in taste, when she appeared in January 1818. Parisians, however, formed a completely different opinion when she appeared with Charles's company at the Odeon theatre. Among those who were most impressed was Hector Berlioz, the composer. Berlioz conducted his *affaires* with a similar intensity to the way he composed music. His amours commenced in 1815, when,

at the age of twelve, he developed an infatuation for the niece of a neighbour, Estelle by name, an eighteen-year-old charmer who wore pink shoes. At twenty-four he first saw the twenty-seven-year-old Harriet Smithson. He became so infatuated with her that, though he could not speak English, he threatened to commit suicide because she ignored him. He then sought what he himself stated to be a 'violent distraction' in the shape of a lady pianist, Marie-Felicite-Denise Moke, known as 'Camille' and later as Camille Pleyel. He then went to Rome, where he met Glinka, and where he subsequently heard rumours of 'Camille's' unfaithfulness, and later, her marriage to Pleyel. He started for Paris to kill her, her mother, and himself, but lost the female disguise with which he intended to gain their presence, and so returned to Rome. He returned to Paris, in 1832, where Harriet was performing at the Theatre Italien with her own company and in bad financial straits. Harriet owed 14,000 francs—which was then worth something—and she broke her leg. These misfortunes decided her. She married Berlioz at the British Embassy the following October, a few weeks before 'a man with long hair, piercing eyes, a strange and haggard face,' Paganini, congratulated him on his *Symphonie Fantastique*. Their marriage soon began to break up, largely due to Harriet's stupidity and shrewishness. A few years later Berlioz toured Europe with Mademoiselle Recio, whom he married when Harriet died. Berlioz's second wife died and he then sought out the lady with the pink slippers, now a widow with a grown son, but she had the good sense to refuse his demands. Berlioz, a romantic in every sense, believed that life and art were one and adhered, as his biographers have said, to the theory of his philosophy—*Not Rule but Direct reaction to feeling*—and Harriet, being a woman, showed him how to transform theory into practice. Under the influence of matrimony her initial coolness developed into a fiery passion; her goods vanished as her temper gained corresponding importance. The 'walking lady' as she had been known among Drury Lane audiences, gained fire in the streets of Paris, and was quenched.

In October 1827, Fanny wrote to Harriet St. Leger that Charles had gained success in Paris, but that her mother, though better, less deaf and rather less blind, was so poorly that only time could restore her health. A letter dated later in the same month states that Maria's health is improving slowly though she is unable to write, read, work or occupy herself in any manner. Fanny told Harriet she was going to the theatre more frequently, and had developed a fondness for it. She had witnessed Kean play the Jew and 'returned home a violent Keanite'; some of Kean's mannerisms did not conform to the theory accepted in the Kemble household, nevertheless Fanny says that 'while under the influence of his amazing power of passion it is impossible to reason, analyze, or do anything but surrender one's self to his forcible appeal to one's emotions. He entirely divested Shylock of all poetry or elevation, but invested it with a concentrated ferocity that made one's blood curdle. . . . I am to see him to-morrow in *Richard III*. . . .' this was the role in which Kean gained his first success in London.

No letter dated for the following month exists, but in December, Fanny wrote a letter which has twofold interest in its historical significance and the minute detail she brings to its writing, a letter that has been completely ignored by her biographers, though why it should have been remains a mystery, for it provides a unique sidelight upon her character.

The subject of the letter was a visit which Fanny paid to Marc Brunel's West India Docks and the Thames Tunnel with her father. Mechanical inventions had a great fascination for her. More than that, she gained from them a philosophic content which can only be described as remarkable. The letter opens with the words:

'Oh, Harriet, "*que c'est une jolie chose l'homme.*" Annihilated by any one of the elements if singly opposed to its power, he by his genius yet brings their united forces into bondage, and compels obedience from all their manifold combined strength. We penetrate the earth, we turn the course of rivers, we exalt the valleys and bow down the mountains; and we die and return to our dust, and they remain and remember us no more. Often enough, indeed, the names of great inventors and projectors have been overshadowed or effaced by mere finishers of their work or adaptors of their ideas, who have reaped the honour and emolument due to an obscure originator who passes away from the world, his rightful claim to its admiration and gratitude unknown or unacknowledged. But these obey the law of their being; they cannot but do the work God's inspiration calls them to.'

She passes to describing the visit to the Thames Tunnel:

'You enter, by flights of stairs, the first door, and find yourself on a circular platform which surrounds the top of a well or shaft of about two hundred feet in circumference and five hundred in depth. This well is an immense iron frame of cylindrical form, filled in with bricks. It was constructed on level ground and then, by some wonderful mechanical process, sunk into the earth. In the midst of this is a steam engine, and above, or below, as far as your eye can see, huge arms are working up and down, while the creaking, crashing, whirring noises and the swift whirling wheels all around you, make you feel for the first few minutes as if you were going distracted. I should have liked to look much longer at all these beautiful, wise, working creatures, but was obliged to follow the last of the party through all the machinery down little wooden stairs and along tottering planks, to the bottom of the well. On turning round at the foot of the last flight of steps through an immense dark arch, as far as sight could reach stretched a vaulted passage, smooth earth underfoot, the white arches of the roof beyond one another lengthening on and on in prolonged vista, the whole lighted by a line of gas lamps and as bright, almost, as if it were broad day. It was more like one of the long avenues of light that lead to the abodes of the genii in fairy tales than anything I had ever beheld. The profound stillness of the place, which was first broken by my father's voice, to which the vaulted roof gave extraordinary and startling volume of tone, the indescribable feeling of subterranean vastness, the amazement and delight I experienced, quite overcame me and I was obliged to turn from the friend who was explaining everything to me, to cry and ponder in silence. . . . Mr. Brunel, who was superintending some of the works, came to my father and offered to conduct us to where the workmen were employed. . . . So we left our broad, smooth path of light

and got into dark passages, where we stumbled among coils of ropes and heaps of pipes and piles of planks, and where ground springs were welling up and flowing about in every direction, all of which was very strange. As you may have heard, the tunnel caved in once, and let the Thames in through the roof, and in order that, should such an accident occur again, no lives may be lost, an iron frame has been constructed—a sort of cage, divided into many compartments, in each of which a man with a lantern and his tools is placed—and as they clear the earth away this iron frame is moved onward and advances into new ground. All this was wonderful and curious beyond measure, but the appearance of the workmen themselves, all begrimed, with their brawny arms and legs bare, some standing in black water up to their knees, others laboriously shovelling the black earth in their cages (while they sturdily sung at their task), with the red, murky light of links and lanterns flashing and flickering about them, made up the most striking picture you can conceive. As we returned I remained at the bottom of the stairs last of all, to look back at the beautiful road to Hades, wishing I might be left behind, and then we reascended, through wheels, pulleys and engines, to the upper day. After this we rowed down the river to the docks, lunched on board a splendid East Indiaman, and came home again. I think it is better for me, however, to look at the trees, and the sun, moon, and stars, than at tunnels and docks: they make me too *Humanity proud.*'

It is not inapposite, perhaps, to recall at this stage lines written by Matthew Arnold:

> 'Fine age is ours and marvellous—setting free
> Hopes that were binding us to grey despair,
> Winnowing iron like chaff, outspeeding the airs,
> Conquering with smoky flag the winds at sea,
> Flinging from thunderous wheels immeasurably
> Knowledge like daily light, so that man stares
> Planet-struck with his work-day world, nor dares
> Repeat the old battle of what "shall never be." '

Arnold was a mature man of forty when he wrote those lines in the 1860s. Fanny Kemble's letter was written in 1827. She was then eighteen years of age. The philosophy shown in her remarks, particularly in the last sentence, displays unusual maturity, far in advance of many far older people.

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In the following January, Fanny told Harriet that the Chancery suit over Covent Garden's debts 'is still pending, pending, like the sword of Damocles, over our heads, banishing all security for the present or hope for the future,' though, she says, 'the theatre is doing very well just now, I believe' and adds: 'They are in sad want of a woman at both the theatres (Covent Garden and

Drury Lane). I've half a mind to give Covent Garden one. Don't be surprised. I have something to say to you on the subject, but have not room for it in this letter.'

It was the following month, after an attack of measles, when she wrote:

'. . . Dearest Harriet, in my last letter want of time and room prevented my enlarging on my hint about the stage, but as far as my own determination goes at present, I think it is the course that I shall most likely pursue. You know that independence of mind and body seems to me the greatest desideratum of life. I am not patient or restrained or submissive to authority, and my head and heart are engrossed with the idea of exercising and developing the literary talent which I think I possess. This is meat, drink, and sleep to me; my world, in which I live and have my happiness; and moreover, I hope, my means of fame (the prize for which I pray). . . . I do not think I am fit to marry, to make an obedient wife or affectionate mother. My imagination is paramount with me and would disqualify me, I think, for the everyday, matter-of-fact cares and duties of the mistress of a household and the head of a family. I think I should be unhappy and the cause of unhappiness to others if I were to marry. I cannot swear I shall never fall in love, but if I do I will fall out of it again for I do not think I shall ever so far lose sight of my best interest and happiness as to enter into a relation for which I feel so unfit. Now, if I do not marry, what is to become of me in the event of anything happening to my father? His property is almost all gone. I doubt if we shall ever receive one pound from it. Is it likely that, supposing I were willing to undergo the drudgery of writing for my bread, I could live by my wits and the produce of my brain; or is such an existence desirable?

'Perhaps I might attain to the literary dignity of being the lioness of a season, asked to dinner parties "because I am so clever"; perhaps my writing faculty might become a useful auxiliary to some other less precarious dependence; but to write to eat—to live, in short—that seems to me to earn hard money after a very hard fashion. The stage is a profession that people who have a talent for it make lucrative, and which honourable conduct may make respectable; one which would place me at once beyond the fear of want and that is closely allied in its nature to my beloved literary pursuits.

'If I should (as my father and mother seem to think not unlikely) change my mind with respect to marrying, the stage need be no bar to that, and if I continue to write, the stage might both help me in and derive assistance from my exercise of the pursuit of dramatic authorship. And the mere mechanical labour of writing costs me so little, that the union of the two occupations does not seem to me a difficulty. My father said the other day "There is a fine fortune to be made by any young woman, of even decent talent, on the stage now." A fine fortune is a fine thing. To be sure, there remains a rather material question to settle, that of even "decent talent." A passion for all beautiful poetry I am sure you will grant me; and perhaps be inclined to take my father and mother's word for my dramatic capacity. I spoke to them earnestly on this subject lately, and they both, with some reluctance, I think, answered me, to my questions, that they thought, as far

as they could judge (and, unless partiality blinds them entirely, none can be better judges) I might succeed. In some respects no girl intending herself for this profession can have had better opportunities of acquiring just notions on the subject of acting. I have constantly heard refined and thoughtful criticism on our greatest dramatic works, and in every various way of rendering them effective on the stage. I have been lately frequently to the theatre, and seen and heard observingly, and exercised my own judgment and critical faculty to the best of my ability, according to these same canons of taste by which it has been formed. Nature has certainly not been favourable to me as might have been wished, if I am to embrace a calling where personal beauty, if not indispensable, is so great an advantage. But if the informing spirit be mine, it shall go hard if, with a face and voice obedient to my emotions as mine are, I do not in some measure make up for the want of good looks. My father is now proprietor and manager of the theatre, and those certainly are favourable circumstances for my entering on a career which is one of great labour and some exposure, at the best, to a woman, and where a young girl cannot be too prudent herself, nor her protectors too careful of her. I hope I have not taken up this notion hastily, and I have no fear of looking only on the bright side of the picture, for ours is a house where that is very seldom seen.'

A key to much of what she has written is supplied in a postscript to the letter which includes the following:

'My father's income is barely eight hundred a year. John's expenses, since he has been at college, have been nearly three. Five hundred a year for such a family as ours is very close and careful work, dear Harriet, and if my going on the stage would nearly double that income, lessen my dear father's anxieties for us all, and the quantity of work which he latterly has often felt too much for him, and remove the many privations which my dear mother cheerfully endures, as well as the weight of her uncertainty about our future provision, would not this be a "consummation devoutly to be wished"?'

This is quite a remarkable letter. Fanny is still only eighteen. Yet she states a mature understanding and comprehension of herself, her capabilities, her chances of success, of Charles's connection with the theatre, with a sincerity and honesty in assessing her chances that is most unusual in one so young. Through the somewhat stilted prose of the period a few years before Victoria's accession to the throne, there shines a sincerity whose light is almost painful. Few have excelled, though many may have equalled, the frankness, in parts the nakedness, with which she sums up the situation and in a style which, though stilted, reveals no hesitation in reasoning or break between purpose and expression.

At some time the following month she writes that she has approached her father for permission to go on the stage 'should our miserably uncertain circumstances finally settle unfavourably' to which he has given no direct reply beyond saying that he would be sorry to see her adopt the stage for a career Twice in a month her parents have attempted to dissuade her against a stage

career, at the very time she has resigned herself to it. She gives Harriet comment upon a play she has written and adds:

> 'I wish I could write a good prose work, but that, I take it, is really difficult, as good, concise, clear prose must be much less easy to write than even tolerable poetry.'

Fanny was not happy at this time. Not unnatural in the circumstances. Life at home had become difficult. She knew herself to be in 'a chaotic state of fermentation'. She was vehement and excitable, violently impulsive, and with 'a wild ill-regulated imagination'. Temperament was beginning to claim an outlet.

Friends of the family were continually appearing and disappearing. She went to her first ball, at the home of a Mrs. Edward Goldsmith, wearing an Anne Boleyn costume of white satin, point-lace, and white Roman pearls, which entranced her. The gown was made by her mother. She met Mrs. Jameson, who later provided her with an idea of giving public lectures, the advice which set Fanny off as a Shakespearian reader. She received invitations to visit the Basil Montagus, who counted among their friends such people as Coleridge, Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, and others.

Basil Montagu, thrice married, was the son of the Earl of Sandwich and Miss Wray, a beauty of earlier days, who had been shot dead by her German lover in a private box at a theatre, after which he committed suicide: an incident which lent some force to the O.P. rioters' opinion of the danger of private boxes. His third wife was a widow with a small girl when they met. From them Fanny heard a story of the pleasanter supernatural. The night after she had first met her future husband, Mrs. Montagu told her host and hostess at breakfast that he had come to her and said he wanted her to look after two caskets containing the relics of his two former wives. After Montagu proposed to her, he did ask her to take care of two caskets—containing not the dead ladies' remains, but letters they had written him. Fanny was inclined to accept a naturalistic explanation of this, but Mrs. Montagu firmly believed it to be supernatural.

Among other people she met at the time was Henry Siddons's wife, a Scotswoman whose grandfather is popularly supposed to have been private secretary to the Young Pretender. Henry, eldest son of Sarah Siddons, had attempted a career upon the stage but without success. For some time before he died he had managed an Edinburgh theatre. At his death his widow, responsible for their four children, undertook joint proprietorship of the theatre, with her brother, William Murray, acting as manager. After a meeting in London, Fanny was invited to join Henry's widow in Edinburgh for a holiday.

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The ensuing four pages from Fanny's memoirs describe the Edinburgh scene of the period. They have been so assiduously rewritten, with scarcely any additions

to the information she herself gives, that it is sufficient to quote only the first three paragraphs. They are complete, authentic, untouched.

'Edinburgh at that time was still the small but important capital of Scotland, instead of what railroads and modern progress have reduced it to, merely its largest town. Those were the days of the giants, Scott, Wilson, Hogg, Jeffrey, Brougham, Sidney Smith, the Horners, Lord Murray, Alison, and all the formidable intellectual phalanx that held mental dominion over the English-speaking world, under the blue and yellow standard of the *Edinburgh Review*.

'The ancient city had still its regular winter season of fashionable gaiety, during which sedan chairs were to be seen carrying through its streets, to its evening assemblies, the more elderly members of the *beau monde*. The nobility and gentry of Scotland came up from their distant country residences to their town houses in "Auld Reekie," as they now come up to London.

'Edinburgh was a brilliant and peculiarly intellectual centre of society with a strongly marked national character, and the theatre held a distinguished place among its recreations; the many eminent literary and professional men who then made the Scotch capital illustrious being zealous patrons of the drama and frequenters of the playhouse, and proud, with reason, of their excellent theatrical company, at the head of which was William Murray, one of the most perfect actors I have ever known on any stage, and among whom Terry and Mackay, admirable actors and cultivated, intelligent men, were conspicuous for their ability.'

Fanny spent a year in Edinburgh. She went to the theatre frequently to watch her relatives. She walked over the surrounding country-side; she must have enjoyed climbing Salisbury Crags. As she herself says 'Warriston and the Bridge of Dean were still out of town, there was no Scott monument in Princes Street; no railroad terminus with its smoke and scream and steam scaring the echoes of the North Bridge; no splendid Queen's Drive'; Windsor Street, where her cousin-in-law lived, had only recently been finished. It was in Edinburgh that Fanny first witnessed the aurora borealis. She walked along Cramond Beach and became acquainted with men and women who were then in what was classified still as the 'peasantry,' among them a fisherman's wife in Newhaven. In her description of this woman and how Fanny chanced upon her, when she knocked on the cottage door, we see that she would have succeeded in her desire to write. It is another of the pieces of fine descriptive writing which she penned:

'Invited to come in, I did so, and there sat a woman, one of the very handsomest I ever saw, in solitary state, leisurely combing a magnificent curtain of fair hair, that fell over her ample shoulders and bosom and almost swept the ground. She was seated on a low stool, but looked tall as well as large, and her foam-fresh complexion and grey-green eyes might have become Venus Anadyomene herself, turned into a Scots fish-wife of five and thirty, or "thereawa." "Can you tell me of anyone who will take me out in a boat for a little while?" quoth I. She looked steadily at me for a minute, and then

answered laconically, "Ay, my man and boy shall gang wi' ye." A few lusty screams brought her husband and son forth, and at her bidding they got a boat ready, and, with me well covered with sail-cloths, tarpaulins, and rough dreadnaughts of one sort and another, rowed out from the shore into the turmoil of the sea.'

The picture is as clear to-day as when it was first written, having lost nothing of its freshness or clarity through the intervening years.

In Edinburgh she first met Lawrence Macdonald, the sculptor, who completed a bust of her, one of his first works. Macdonald later went to Rome, where he gained success in his profession. Years later, in 1873, she met him in the Italian capital, 'creeping in the sun slowly up the Pincio as I waddled heavily down it (*Eheu !*)', and visited his studio.

She saw the sword of Charles Stuart, a light rapier, the blade which 'startled England and dazzled Scotland at its first unsheathing.' She met Baron Hume, 'a charming old gentleman, of the very old school, who always wore powder and a pigtail, knee-breeches, gold buckles and black silk stockings', and who, when she next visited Scotland, said to her, "Why, madam, they tell me you are to become a great tragic actress—but how am I to believe that of this laughing face, madam?" She went to the last appearance in Edinburgh of the famous singer Madame Catalani, and watched Scots troops, preceded by their bagpipes, drag the famous old cannon gun up to the castle.

Romance came to her while in Edinburgh. Mrs. Henry Siddons's doctor, Combe, was greatly smitten by Fanny. So was Mrs. Henry's son, named Henry after his father and grandfather, a young army officer who had been attached to her for some while. 'We walked and talked and danced and were sentimental together, after the approved cousinly fashion.' The young gallant went to India with her name engraved upon his sword—and spent hours there with the girl he finally married trying vainly to remove it with pumice-stone.

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The year ended, Fanny returned to London, to the house at Buckingham Gate, to find her parents more worried than ever about affairs at the theatre. Her father had never been in debt; the theatre was never out of it. He contemplated selling it, and, like John before him, of going to live abroad. There was a scheme afoot to send Maria and the children to France while he remained in England.

Fanny was caught at the worst psychological time for such news. She had lost her previous resolve to go on the stage if all other means failed to save the theatre. The heart had gone out of her for such a scheme. She wanted to write. 'My own former fancy about going on the stage, and passionate desire for a lonely, independent life in which it had originated, had died away with the sort of moral and mental effervescence which had subsided during my year's residence in Edinburgh.' She was writing a tragedy 'around Fiesco, the Genoese noble's conspiracy against the Dorias, reading Goethe and Schiller. The turn I had exhibited for acting at school appeared to have evaporated, and Covent Garden

itself never occurred to me as a great institution for purposes of art or enlightened public recreation, but only as my father's disastrous property, to which his life was being sacrificed; and every thought connected with it gradually became more and more distasteful to me.'

In a letter to Harriet, dated 23rd August of that year, she said:

> 'I have a great deal to tell you about our affairs. . . . Do you remember a letter I wrote to you a long time ago about going on the stage? and another, some time before that, about my becoming a governess? The urgent necessity which I think now exists for exertion, in all those capable of it amongst us, has again turned my thoughts to these two considerations. My father's property, and all that we might ever have hoped to have derived from it, being utterly destroyed in the unfortunate issue of our affairs, his personal exertions are all that remain to him and us to look to. . . . Those talents and qualifications, both mental and physical, which have been so mercifully preserved to my dear father hitherto, cannot, in the natural course of things, all remain unimpaired for many more years. It is right then that those of us who have the power to do so should at once lighten his arms of all unnecessary burthen, and acquire the habit of independent exertion before the moment when utter inexperience would add to the difficulty of adopting any settled mode of proceeding; it is right and wise to prepare for the evil day before it is upon us. These reflections have led me to the resolution of entering upon some occupation or profession which may enable me to turn the advantages my father has so liberally bestowed upon me. . . .'

So, in the autumn of 1829, Fanny came to the day when her mother told her, during Charles's absence, that the theatre was to be sold. Later, having performed Juliet for her parents, she went to Covent Garden to test her voice, in 'that strange-looking place, the stage with its racks of pasteboard and canvas—streets, forests, banqueting halls and dungeons—drawn apart on either side, empty and silent; not a soul stirring in the indistinct recesses of its mysterious depths . . . the great amphitheatre, equally empty and silent, wrapped in its grey holland covers, would have been absolutely dark but for the long, sharp, thin shaft of light that darted here and there from some height and distance far above me and alighted in a sudden vivid spot of brightness on the stage . . . my father's voice coming to me from where he stood. . . .' There followed three weeks of rehearsal, in the mornings at the theatre, in the evenings at home, and discussions on the costume her mother was making—a dress of plain white satin with a long train, short sleeves and a low body, a girdle of fine paste brilliants, and a small comb of the same. Maria supervised the making of all Fanny's costumes in those years.

'My frame of mind under the preparations that were going forward for my début appears to me now curiously enough,' she wrote later. 'I found out that I could act, and had acted with a sort of frenzy of passion and entire self-forgetfulness . . . my going on the stage was absolutely an act of duty and conformity to the will of my parents, strengthened by my own conviction that I was bound to help them by every means in my power. The theatrical profession was, however, utterly distasteful to me, though acting itself, that is to say, dramatic personation was not. . . .

'But this,' she added, 'is the reason why, with an unusual gift and many unusual advantages for it, I did really so little; why my performances were always uneven in themselves and perfectly unequal with each other, never complete as a whole, however striking in occasional parts, and never at the same level two nights together, depending for their effect upon the state of my nerves and spirits, instead of being the result of deliberate thought and consideration—study, in short, carefully and conscientiously applied to my work, the permanent element which preserves the artist, however inevitably he must feel the influence of moods and mind and body, from ever being at their mercy. I brought but one-half of the necessary material to the exercise of my profession, that which nature gave me; and never added the cultivation and labour requisite to produce any fine performance in the right sense of the word; and coming of a family of *real* artists, have never felt that I deserved that honourable name.'

In those words is a greater honesty than either Fanny's critics or her admirers have ever given her credit for.

Fanny was emotional, intelligent, used to good conversation, sincere to the point of intensity, and, from the day of her birth, had been surrounded with talk of events in the theatre. She was extremely good at expressing herself—which made it correspondingly difficult for her to express and live fictional characters and their emotions. Atmosphere influenced her greatly; she could describe it fluently in words, both its cause and its effect upon her mind. Emotional intensity probably robbed her of easy humour, but she had a sharp wit. In her youth, although unmistakably feminine in outlook, she was already thinking along lines which placed her far in advance of most women of her generation. She had the background, the opportunities, the instinct of a player, but lacked the inner desire, the need, which alone could have given these qualities their fullest expression. She believed she would fail and later was sure she had failed.

Others formed a different opinion. They were to have a different opinion throughout her career. If they are to be heeded, there were to be moments when Fanny reached the heights.

It may be thought that no useful purpose has been served by branching out into seeing the people Fanny met, the incidents related about them, the letters she wrote, during her formative years. Yet how can this be true? Each influence, however small, plays its part in moulding the developing character; every individual mirrors the influences they have encountered. Naturally, for the true artist, these influences are sharper than they are upon those less concerned with the artist's outlook. Consequently all these personalities, the daily concerns of their lives, however trivial, by reaching Fanny, helped shape her mentality, her opinions, and capabilities.

CHAPTER III

THE events of the fifth of October, 1829, are too well known for us to do more than recall them briefly.

There was no rehearsal that day. Charles believed it might prove too tiring for Fanny. She spent the morning quietly, practising the piano and walking in St. James's Park. She read chapters in Blunt's *Scripture Characters* which related to St. Peter and Jacob, not deliberately but under compulsion of 'an instinct of self-preservation . . . a powerful instinct which has struggled and partially prevailed throughout my whole life against the irregular and passionate vehemence of my temperament. . . .'

When she left for the theatre late in the afternoon, mellow autumn sunshine brightened the skies and glowed along the streets and her mother said: "Heaven smiles on you, my child." The words might well have recalled to Fanny's mind her aunt Siddons's relief, many years before, when she awoke to find the sun shining on the morning of her second London début. No record remains of what thoughts occupied Fanny's mind as the carriage drove through the busy streets from St. James's to the theatre, but it may be guessed that the usual excitement and chaos of any young actress in the hours immediately before her début were deepened in Fanny's case with her own dislike of what is happening and knowledge of her father's plight if she failed. Finally the journey was over, the carriage halted before the theatre doors.

And then they were all inside the theatre, preparing for the début of the girl who was probably the most unwilling actress in history.

Those hours before she went on to the stage were to remain in her memory throughout her life. The playbill shows that her mother, Maria, was there, making an appearance after twenty years' absence from the stage, welcoming the new Kemble by playing *Lady Capulet*. Her father, Charles, was there, as *Mercutio*, playing for the first time the role of which critics said his performance was 'incomparably the best that ever trod the English stage.' Old Mrs. Davenport was there, as *The Nurse*. There had been some difficulty in finding a *Romeo* for Fanny's *Juliet*. At first it was thought that Charles might take the part. The suggestion was squashed when it was realized that he was too old for the part and that public objection might be raised against his appearing in the role opposite his own daughter. The next suggestion was Fanny's brother Henry, but he was three years younger than she and with such a great dislike for acting that he was unable to assume any reality of sentiment while making his speeches. Finally the choice had been made of Abbot, a man only a few years younger than Charles, a sincere, unimportant actor. Two other important names showed on the original playbill for the occasion. There was mention that Mr. Kean would act for three nights in the future. In less than a year Edmund Kean would retire; in four he would be dead, having fallen mortally ill while playing *Othello*. The other name was that of Ellen Tree, shortly to make her Covent Garden début and become Charles Kean's wife.

These were the players, who, with the other members of the cast, gathered in their dressing-rooms to prepare for Fanny's first night. The tension back stage was so great that no one escaped it. Everyone was on edge. Aunt Dall, a maid, and a dresser prepared Fanny for the ordeal, doing their utmost to soothe her nerves while she got ready. '. . . there I sat, ready for execution, with the palms of my hands pressed convulsively together, and the tears I in vain endeavoured to repress welling up into my eyes and brimming slowly over, down my rouged cheeks. . . .' Charles, more worried than the rest, inquired twice how she was. Later a voice sounded as a tap came on the door: "Miss Kemble called for the stage, ma'am!" Fanny, frightened at the noise from the audience in front as her mother walked on to the stage, was led out of her dressing-room and into the wings. Keeley, playing the part of Peter, told her not to be frightened by the audience: "Don't think of them any more than if they were so many rows of cabbages," he advised. "Nurse," called Lady Capulet. Mrs. Davenport went on to the stage, turned and called: "Juliet!"

The moment had come.

Aunt Dall pushed Fanny into mobility. . . .

'. . . I ran straight across the stage, stunned with the tremendous shout that greeted me, my eyes covered with mist, and the green baize flooring of the stage feeling as if it rose up against my feet, but I got hold of my mother, and stood like a terrified creature at bay, confronting the huge theatre full of gazing human beings. I do not think I uttered a word during this scene which could have been audible. In the next, the ballroom, I began to forget myself. In the following one, the balcony scene, I had done so, and, for aught I knew, I was Juliet; the passion I knew sending hot waves . . . all over my neck and shoulders, while the poetry sounded like music to me as I spoke it, with no consciousness of anything before me, utterly transported into the imaginary existence of the play. After this, I did not return into myself till all was over . . . amid a tumultuous storm of applause, congratulations, tears, embraces, and a general joyous explosion of unutterable relief at the fortunate termination of my attempt. . . .'

CHAPTER IV

(1)

THE audience loved her. The theatre had been packed to welcome her; when the final curtain descended the stage was littered with bouquets, the stage-door was jammed with admirers and well-wishers, young men stood on their seats to clap, men and women continued to call her name. A few older people in the audience might, in the manner of their kind, comment that she was not equal to her aunt Siddons, but for the overwhelming majority, both before and behind the footlights, the début had been a triumph.

Newspaper comment was impressive. It was an age of fine critics whose opinions set a high standard which not even their lesser-known colleagues could ignore. There were Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, Thomas Noon Talford, and John Hamilton Reynolds; Keats and Lamb did occasional work. With such names as these recently or still actively at work, setting not only the standard of newspaper criticism but aiding conscientious players to sharper appreciation of their work, Fanny's first appearance would not have been greeted with praise had her performance been bad.

'Upon the whole, we do not remember to have seen a more triumphant début,' wrote *The Times* critic. 'That Miss Kemble has been well and carefully instructed, as, of course, she would be, is clear, but it is no less clear that she possesses qualifications which instruction could not create, although it can bring them to perfection. We shall have probably many further opportunities of returning to the subject, and unless that should happen in this case which never yet did in any other, that an actress whose first essay has been so excellent shall prove less on future occasions, it may be reasonably expected that Miss Kemble will prove a great acquisition to the dramatic strength of the theatre.'

The critic for the *Athenæum* wrote that her interpretation of Juliet was true, tender, dignified, graceful, energetic, and occasionally sublime. The *New Monthly Magazine* said: ' . . . the illusion that she was Shakespeare's own Juliet came so speedily upon us as to suspend the power of specific criticism . . . in boldness and dignity she unquestionably approaches more nearly to Mrs. Siddons than any actress of our time excepting Pasta.'

Fanny admitted that her later work was characterized by unevenness. Upon occasion her mother would sum up her performance as "Beautiful, my dear." On others the summing-up would be: "My dear, your performance was not fit to be seen . . . you had better give up the whole thing at once than go on doing it so disgracefully ill."

After the début Fanny performed three times a week. On the days when she was due on the stage at night she lived a Spartan existence. She lunched off a mutton-chop: 'I might have been a Harrow boy for diet.' In the afternoon she went to the theatre and busied herself with needlework in the dressing-room. She was not allowed to enter the green-room; her parents, who were largely

responsible for inducing her aversion to the stage as a career for herself, imagined she might encounter 'undesirable associates' there.

Within a month the tenor of her life was changed. The most important event was that she was able to take back to her mother every week the thirty guineas which was her salary, a more imposing salary than that earned by aunt Siddons during her early days at Drury Lane. This was the only triumph she herself had wished to achieve, a knowledge that she was helping to make Covent Garden a better paying proposition for her father and was able to pay her own way at home. This was the hard core of success, the one she valued most, the outcome of the desire to help her parents.

Around this fluttered the excitements of first days of theatrical success: 'From an insignificant schoolgirl, I had suddenly become an object of general public interest. . . . I was a little lion in society. . . .' She had her own carriage. Younger men in her audiences sported handkerchiefs patterned with violet representations of her head. Cups and saucers carried her picture. Engravings of her portrait appeared in the windows of the print shops. Such an experience was undoubtedly exciting. The toast of a season in London, fêted and admired, the constant new name on every fashionable lip; the prospect conjures up many entrancing wonders. Few young women could resist the allures inherent in such a possibility. Fanny, however, was different. She saw the prospect overshadowed with frightening, perilous complications.

The Kemble family tended to a belief that other players were not always as well-intentioned or well-conducted as themselves. That influence was already at work on Fanny. Outside of family affairs, Harriet St. Leger was more concerned with aiding Fanny's search for values and truth than with observation of her fellow-humans. These combined influences made Fanny view her future with great alarm.

On 14th December, 1829, Fanny wrote:

'Dearest Harriet,

'I received your letter this morning, before I was out of my room, and very glad I was to get it. You would have heard from me again ere this, had it not been that, in your present anxious state of mind respecting your brother, I did not like to demand your attention for my proceedings. My trial is over, and, thank Heaven! most fortunately. Our most sanguine wishes could hardly have gone beyond the result, and at the same time that I hail my success as a source of great happiness to my dear father and mother, I almost venture to hope that the interest it has excited in the public may tend to revive the decaying dramatic art. You say it is a very fascinating occupation; perhaps it is, though it does not appear so to me, and I think it carries with it drawbacks enough to operate as an antidote to the vanity and love of admiration which it can hardly fail to foster. The mere embodying of the exquisite ideals of poetry is a great enjoyment, but after that, or rather for that, comes in ours, as in all arts, the mechanical process, the labour, the refining, the controlling the very feeling one has, in order to manifest it in the best way to the preception of others. When all that intense feeling and careful work can accomplish has been accomplished, an actor often sees

points of his performance which are most worthy of approbation, ignored or condemned, while others, broader, cruder, less subtle, are commended and praised. Above all, a consciousness of a role and the best performance of it, must in acting, as in all art, be a powerful check to vanity and self-preservation.'

In the last sentence there sounds the tongue of a mentally mature thinker, if not of an artist who has bridged the gulf between theory and practice. There too speaks the voice of Sarah Siddons. The letter continues:

'As to the mere excitement proceeding from the public applause of a theatre, I am sure you will believe me when I say I do not think I shall ever experience it. But should I reckon too much upon my own steadiness, I have the incessant care and watchfulness of my dear mother to rely on, and I do rely on it as an invaluable safeguard, both to the purity and good taste of all that I may do on the stage, and the quiet and soberness of my mind under all this new excitement. She has borne all her anxieties wonderfully well, and I now hope she will reap some repayment for them. My dear father is very happy; indeed, we have all cause for heart-felt thankfulness when we think what a light has dawned upon our prospects, lately so dismal and overcast. My own motto in all this must be, as far as possible, "Beget a temperament in all things." I trust I shall be enabled to rule myself by it, and in the firm hope that my endeavour to do what is right will be favoured and assisted, I have committed myself, nothing doubting, to the stormy sea of life. Dearest Harriet, the papers will give you a detailed account of my début. I only wish to assure you that I have not embraced this course without due dread of its dangers, and a firm determination to watch, as far as in me lies, over its effect upon my mind. It is, after all, but lately, you know, that I have become convinced that fame and gratified ambition are not the worthiest aims for one's exertions. With affectionate love, believe me ever your fondly attached

FANNY.'

Fanny's comment upon reviving 'the decaying dramatic art' was not as conceited as it might at first appear. The theatre was, indeed, in sorry state. William Archer, the critic, has said: 'We are pretty safe in setting down the twenty-five years between 1810 and 1825 as the winter solstice of English drama.' Herein was the first cause for the decadence of the theatre. Competition from the equestrian shows, and the music-halls, came later, causing the performing dogs and horses to be included in legitimate dramas as an attempt to meet the challenge on its own grounds.

Many illnesses afflicted the patent theatres through those years. Covent Garden endured them in common with the others, and, in addition, suffered torment from its own unique malady, a sickness which outweighed all others in importance and defeated every effort to try to provide it with a healthy existence. The original cause had been the privilege system itself. From that had developed a disease which could not be traced to any source where treatment was possible and to which every source added its quota of misery to keep the disease

at work and spread its control over the theatre. It reached its highest point in the involved relationships of the proprietors, and in their dealings with the various managements who attempted to make the theatre a working concern.

No record of Covent Garden at that time can be complete without some understanding of the main details of this sickness. It dominated the theatre. It dominated everyone connected with the theatre: proprietors, managements, stars, musicians, contemporary dramatists, stage-hands, property men, and office staff. There is tragedy in this spectacle of men and women fighting an endless, hopeless battle against an evil which could be traced to no one cause or person, and, in their battle, turning against each other.

(2)

In December, 1731, John Rich, son of the Christopher Rich, described as 'a waspish, ignorant pettifogger' who had bought a share in the Drury Lane patent for £80 in 1688 (?1690), proposed that a theatre be built on a site in Covent Garden leased from the Duke of Bedford at £100 per annum. A number of gentlemen came forward; the theatre was built and opened a year later, with Congreve's *Way of the World*. Financial difficulties were soon encountered, but twenty-seven years later the theatre was finally out of mortgage and in Rich's pocket. In 1769, Rich's executors sold the theatre's patents to four men; George Cotman, William Powell, a Mr. Rutherford, and Thomas Harris. Harris may be the same individual whose signature appears on the will made by Handel in 1759, at a time when the composer had connections with the theatre.

When John Philip Kemble became financially interested in Covent Garden in 1802 the concern was valued at £138,000; half of the interest belonged to Harris, and Lewis, the stage-manager, owned one-sixth. It was Lewis's share which John Philip bought for £23,000. In that year Harris took over active management of the theatre. Some seven or eight years later his son Henry came to assist his father direct the theatre's fortunes and later took it over completely.

Charles Kemble appears to have disliked Henry Harris almost from first sight. The dislike was mutual. In the memoirs of Bunn, a later Covent Garden manager, there is reference to an alleged quarrel between them in 1817, when Harris slapped Charles's face. Two years later the season proved so bad that there seemed scarcely any chance of keeping the theatre open, due mainly to Drury Lane offering bigger money to the best players. In the midst of this debacle the two gentlemen had a fierce quarrel, shouting accusations at each other of being responsible for the season's failure, while players and stage-hands watched the argument. As a result of the dispute Harris temporarily withdrew from the theatre; he told a friend that the following morning matters looked so black that he did not know whether he might not shoot himself before nightfall. The situation was bad; the theatre was only able to remain open because players offered to forgo their salaries until Christmas; there was no available cash in the theatre's exchequer. Harris then proposed that Macready should appear in *Richard III*. Macready, although a fine actor, was far from being adapted physically to playing the role which had made

Kean famous, but public interest was aroused by the idea and Macready, then in his 'twenties, went on to the stage to earn a success which placed him among the finest players in the history of British drama.

In the following October, Thomas Harris died. Whilst he had lived absolute control of the theatre had been vested in him and could be deputed to whomever he decided, but at his death the right could not pass to his son Henry, who was acting as manager. This was the stage at which John Philip passed his interest of one-sixth to Charles, thereby maintaining the Kemble hold on the theatre's fortunes. In addition to the original sum John Philip had paid, he had spent another £80,000 (the figure given by Fanny) in rebuilding the theatre after the fire in 1809. Neither Charles nor Henry Harris enjoyed this close proximity into which events had thrown them. At no time does their relationship appear to have worked with more than an outward show of business cordiality. To do Harris justice, the fault was not mainly his. Charles was a highly strung, imaginative man, and the highly strung and imaginative do not make the good business men they frequently imagine themselves to be, while Harris, though highly strung, though unimaginative, was a business man. Harris's single interest was the theatre's financial well-being. Where he erred, and erred grievously, was in allowing some of the things which were permitted on the stage, yet even here he was concerned solely with making money. His actions may be held in suspicion, but the cause for them, an attempt to appease the public taste, cannot be disputed.

The theatrical profession has long found abundant delight in attributing the presence of evil spirits, now known as "jinx" (a term which used to mean high and quite healthy spirits) for accidents or injuries afflicting a theatre, play, or player. A leading lady falls from her carriage and breaks a leg on her first night, a contralto contracts measles; the roof falls in; the leading male player blows out his brains: these incidents never have a natural explanation, it is always the jinx. Covent Garden abounded with jinxes. A whole family of them made it a home from whatever sphere in which they originated.

Part of what these tribulations, natural and supernatural, meant to the theatre can be gained from noting what happened, following the story in the hodge-podge of its occurrence. All had bearing on Fanny's career.

Twelfth Night was put on as an opera. *The Tempest* was performed with songs by Reynolds, and what one writer refers to as 'mutilations and barbarous ingraftings of Dryden and Davenport'.

In the twelve seasons following the time that John Philip opened the new theatre, receipts were £991,811 or an average of only £82,650 per annum, so the *Theatrical Observer* of September 1831 informs us.

Harris was getting £1,000 per annum, a sum which had been payable to his father as manager, and which, under agreement with the other proprietors, became his salary, and at this juncture Charles formed a clique with the other proprietors—Mr. Willet, Captain Forbes, R.N., and the representatives of Mrs. Martindale—to oust Harris from his position, in which he held thirteen twenty-fourths of the entire holding. Harris made an offer to buy out the others and then proposed to withdraw from management completely on payment of £12,500 per annum. The offer was not accepted. Harris then offered to take over the theatre and pay the others £13,500 per annum. This offer was rejected,

but they accepted his initial offer, and, as a result, became Harris's tenants for seven years at a rent of £12,000 per annum. Harris, not quite the complete business man, did not ask for a lease to be signed, but allowed possession of the theatre upon signature of an agreement to sign it. On 11th March, 1822, Charles became actor-manager of the theatre. Of the new board probably the only one with real knowledge of what to do was Fawcett, then the stage-manager.

All this time the age-old quarrel with Drury Lane was continuing without any sign of abating. If anything, it waxed even fiercer. Drury Lane paid better prices; it was quicker in putting on its shows or withdrawing them. One example will suffice to illustrate what happened. On 28th January, 1823, Charles put on *Nigel* or *The Crown Jewels*, by Scott. The play was presented in a desperate hurry because the Lane was about to produce the same play. The Lane's manager, Elliston, noted that the play was not a success at Covent Garden, and immediately abandoned his own production.

Later in that same season a play was presented which is now completely forgotten, *Clari* or *The Maid of Milan*, an opera by Howard Payne and Bishop. In it was a tune which became famous throughout the world; it was called *Home, Sweet Home*. The *Harmonicum* said that this tune, supposedly based on an air from Sicily, was beautiful 'whether it was born under the serene sky of classic Sicily or beneath the dense clouds that overhang Covent Garden.' In the same year an old, in fact the oldest, employee was retired: John Brandon, the box-office keeper whom the O.P. rioters had demanded be sacked, and whom John Philip had discharged and re-employed.

Throughout the year play followed play, singer followed singer, light opera followed light opera. On 9th July, 1824, an effort founded on a romance by Mrs. Shelley was presented; it was then entitled *Presumption*, or *The Fate of Frankenstein*. It did not prove successful.

In the following year Madame Vestris made one of her frequent appearances at the theatre, this time as Macheath in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, and later as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*.

Weber came, and died. The jinx. In 1827 a dramatization of Paltock's novel, written in 1751, of *Peter Wilkins*, or *The Flying Indians* was presented. This alone is sufficient to show the lack of material at the time. The play was dramatic and spectacular; it was successful, and played fifty times.

Nine thousand pounds was paid for an elephant for one production. This animal went mad within a few weeks, whether from chagrin or pique is unknown, and the production was cancelled.

The season of 1828-29 was unremarkable except for a farewell appearance of Kean and a fatality which affected the theatre at the height of the season. This was when a gasholder in the basement exploded and killed a storekeeper and the gas-man. That occurred on 20th November. The theatre did not reopen until 3rd December. The theatre was closed for a fortnight. The jinx.

The issue of 'orders,' now called complimentary seats, given to or demanded by performers and Press added to the box-office losses. Bunn delivered an angry opinion on the misuse of these by the Press and saying that it claimed 'them on the score of reciprocity . . . and although by such argument they should naturally be extended only to those journals whose circulation can render a corresponding

advantage, yet, if you omit a paper or periodical of the vilest description, your reputation is assailed by it, and your exertions misrepresented in the most shameless and mendacious manner.' If the figures given by Bunn are correct, the theatre lost a considerable amount of money through the number of 'orders' issued; between 17th May and 12th July, 1824, 11,003 orders given out, representing a total of £3,851 1s.

In the following August a distraint warrant was issued by a Bow Street magistrate. Bailiffs, representing St. Paul's Parish Church, Covent Garden, entered the theatre to collect £896, and the King's tax-gatherer arrived to collect taxes assessed at over £600.

In 1831 the House of Commons appointed a committee to investigate the rights of the privileged theatres, and called many famous figures of the stage to give evidence, including Charles, who, not unnaturally, predicted disaster if the system of privileges be abolished, that great trouble would afflict players in the privileged companies, and that the best plays would find difficulty in gaining actors or hearing.

These were some of the events at the theatre which affected Charles during the years he was connected with it, and the first two years that Fanny was playing there. Primarily an actor, a man whose sole interests were to bring credit to his work as a member of the Kemble family and to protect the interests of his wife and children, Charles's worry can be understood, his shortcomings as a manager appreciated if not exonerated. When Fanny's first success was still the talk of London and the provinces his hopes for the future, his belief that her freshness and intelligence would aid the theatre to revise the dying art of the drama, and finally solve the theatre's financial entanglements, can be understood. Charles had sufficient courage to be a gambler.

(3)

The comment in Fanny's letter to Harriet, upon the difficulty the artist encounters in a need for mechanical assistance to give birth to an artistic conception —above all, in the controlling of feeling—is one no artist can escape. In its first stages, during which Fanny became aware of it and mentioned it, it can be a damnable obstacle. The significant point of Fanny's comment is that she had become aware of it so early.

Mention of her mother's 'incessant watchfulness,' a guardianship in which Charles played an equal role, outweighed in importance the comment she made, fifty years later, to the effect that she did not know from where she got an idea of the 'moral dangers' of the theatrical life though 'certainly not from my parents.' In later life she was inclined to attribute this to 'the vapid vacuity of the last years of my aunt Siddons's life which had made a profound impression upon me—her apparent deadness and indifference to everything, which I attributed to the withering and drying influence of the over-stimulating atmosphere of emotion, excitement, and admiration in which she had passed her life.' This observation may have made an impression upon her, though it is difficult to trace any connection between it and the 'moral dangers' of which she was aware, and of which

Fanny's parents were aware, lurking in the green room. Mrs. Siddons was scarcely a warning of what immorality would do. Neither was Fanny's mother. Her beliefs would seem to have been derived from a stronger source, probably without her being aware of it, the influence of her home.

But the departure from safe shores had been made and her first season was gaining speed. Work and the everyday events of the time kept her too busy to do more than philosophize when writing to Harriet.

At the commencement of the following year, Sir Thomas Lawrence died.

Fanny had known Lawrence for some time. He had painted both her aunt Siddons and her uncle John. For a time he had been engaged to her aunt's daughter, another Sarah, but had discovered himself to be more in love with Sarah's younger sister, Maria. Such issues are apt to complicate the hardiest souls, and neither girl could lay claim to robustness. Lawrence was distraught. After some time he obtained Mrs. Siddons's permission to break off his engagement with Sarah and become engaged to Maria. He married neither. In a few months both had died of consumption. Maria died first, exacting a death-bed promise from her sister not to marry Lawrence. Within a short time Sarah also died. Believing that these romantic entanglements had hastened her daughters' death, Mrs. Siddons became estranged from Lawrence. He had been a regular visitor at Charles's and Maria's home, and had only recently made a pencil sketch of Fanny, his last finished work. Fanny records that while this sketch was being done Sarah had said to Charles, "When I die, I wish to be carried to my grave by you and Lawrence." When the story was related to the painter, he exclaimed "Good God, did she say that?" and started to cry. The sketch he had done of Fanny reminded her mother of the dead Maria. She said as much to Lawrence, who became very agitated and said: "Oh, she is very like her; she is very like them all!"

Fanny has been represented as playing the social game directly she went on the stage. The implications of this suggestion have no basis in fact. From her earliest years, through mere accident of birth, she was constantly meeting some of the outstanding figures of her time. It is worth noting, however, that from this time on, though her acquaintances increased, she made few friends.

At some time while playing in her first London season she was given lessons in riding by Captain Fozzard, the leading riding-master of the day. One afternoon Fozzard introduced her to a middle-aged lady, the Duchess of Kent, and her daughter. That was the first time Fanny saw the future Queen Victoria.

A few weeks later she wrote Harriet a reply upon a criticism of one of her performances given to Harriet by another woman.

The letter opens with a truth which has never been denied:

> 'Comparison is the criticism of the multitude . . . to be compared with either Mrs. Siddons or Miss O'Neill is above my expectations. They were both professional actresses, which I can hardly yet claim to be; women who had for years studied the mechanical part of their art, and rendered themselves proficient in their business; whilst although I have certainly had many advantages . . . I am totally inexperienced in all the minor technical processes most necessary for the due execution of any dramatic conception. As

to my aunt Siddons—look at her, Harriet; look at her fine person, her beautiful face; listen to her magnificent voice, and supposing that I were as highly endowed with poetical dramatic imagination as she was (which I certainly am not), is it likely that there can ever be a shadow of comparison between her and myself, even when years may have corrected all that is at present crude and imperfect in my efforts?'

The second play in which she appeared was *The Grecian Daughter* by Murphy. Fanny thought it 'a feeble and inflated composition', certainly 'the sort of parental and conjugal interest that infallibly strikes sympathetic chords in the *paterfamilias* bosom of an English audience.' In it she played a role previously performed by her aunt. In a letter to Harriet she said:

'It had been, you know, a great part of my aunt Siddons's. Nothing better proves her great dramatic genius than her having clothed so meagre a part in such magnificent proportions as she gave to it, and filled out by her own poetical conception the bare skeleton Mr. Murphy's *Euphrasia* presented to her. This frightened me a great deal. . . . My skirt was made immensely full and with a long train; it was of white merino, almost as fine as cashmere, with a rich gold Grecian border. . . . I had on flesh-coloured silk gloves. A bright scarlet sash with heavy gilt acorns, falling to my feet, scarlet sandals to match, and a beautiful Grecian head-dress in gold, devised by my mother, completed the whole, which really had a very classical effect, the fine material of which my dress was formed falling with every movement into soft, graceful folds.

'I managed to keep a good heart until I heard the flourish of drums and trumpets, in the midst of which I had to rush on the stage, and certainly when I did come on my appearance must have been curiously in contrast with the "brave words" I uttered, for I felt like nothing but a hunted hare, with my eyes starting from my head, my "nostrils all wide," and my limbs trembling to such a degree that I could scarcely stand. The audience received me very kindly, however, and after a while I recovered my breath and self-possession, and got on comfortably, considering that, what with nervousness and the short time they had had to study them in, none of the actors was perfect in their parts. . . . The play went off admirably. I dare say it is too dull and poor in itself, despite all that can be done for it, to be of much use to the theatre.'

In a letter dated 20th February she wrote:

'On Thursday next I come out in Mrs. Beverley. I am much afraid of it. The play wants the indispensable attribute of all works of art—imagination; it is a most touching story and Mrs. Beverley is a most admirable creature, but the story is such as might be read in a newspaper, and her character has its like in many an English home. I think the author should have idealized both his incidents and his heroine a little, to produce a really fine play. Mrs. Beverley is not one shade inferior to Imogen in purity, in conjugal devotion,

and in truth, but while the one is to all intents and purposes a model wife, a poet's touch had made of the other a divine image on all that is lovely and excellent in woman; and yet, certainly, Imogen is quite as real a conception as Mrs. Beverley. The absence of the poetical element in the play prevents my being enthusiastic about my part, and I am the more nervous about it for that reason; when I am excited I feel that I can excite others, but in this case—— However, we shall see; I may succeed with it better than I expect, and perhaps my audience may like to see me as a quiet, sober lady, after the Belvideras and Juliets and Euphrasias they have hitherto seen me represent. I will tell you about my dress. It is a silver-grey silk, and a white crêpe hat with drooping feathers. I think it will be very pretty.'

The letter ends with a postscript:

'This is my summer tour—Bath, Edinburgh, Dublin, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham. I am Miss *Fanny* Kemble, because Henry Kemble's daughter, my uncle Stephen's grand-daughter, is Miss Kemble by right of birth.'

The first season ended on 28th May. She had appeared in a quantity of other roles, among them Portia, in which her playing of the trial scene awakened criticism by being unorthodox: unusual methods of presenting well-known characters or scenes from well-aired plays were frequently condemned out of hand. Most critics found her performance modest, intelligent, and sincere. Even Leigh Hunt, her foremost critic, found her Portia better than most of her other roles.

Apart from the productions of Shakespeare's plays the other plays were uninspiring. At the very time that Fanny should have had roles which developed the genuine interest which was in her during those days there was nothing which fitted either her outlook or mentality. She was called on to interpret a series of women whose mentality she did not share in plays which lacked poetry and intelligence. She played in *The Gamester*, as Isabella in Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, as Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*, and as Lady Townley in *The Provoked Husband*.

(4)

These pieces, the main modern dramatic fare of the period, are worthy of attention. None was new. Most of them had weathered over a hundred years.

There was *The Fatal Marriage*. The theatre generally showed a staunch predilection for fatality—due, perhaps, to attempts to appease the jinx—and this was one of the brood spawned. Among the others were *The Fatal Contract*, *Fatal Curiosity*, *Fatal Dowry*, *Fatal Extravagance*, *Fatal Falsehood*, and so on, down the alphabet of woe.

The Fatal Marriage, which had the engaging sub-title of *The Innocent Adultery*, had been based by Southerne on a novel by Mrs. Aphra Behn (born in Surinam

and buried in Westminster Abbey), a work evolved somewhere between 1671 and 1689, under the title of *The Nun* or *The Perjur'd Beauty*. This drama first reached the stage in 1694, destined for a lengthy if not noticeably honoured place in the history of drama. From the time Garrick revived it under the name of *Isabella*, it had reappeared every few years, the plot only slightly changed, settings and dialogue altered to conform to later taste. The story tells how the gay and innocent Isabella, marries Biron against his father's wish and how Biron, sent to take part in the siege of Candy, is rumoured dead. Isabella, repudiated by Biron's father, suffers the whole gamut of misery relished by earlier playwrights: debasement, poverty, hunger. The engaging figure of the rich and handsome Villeroy hovers around her with a proposal of marriage. For seven years Villeroy hovers, his desire unrequited, until Isabella, lengthily convinced that she is unequipped for widowhood, heeds the advice of Carlos, her husband's evilly scheming brother, and accepts matrimonial succour from Villeroy. The next situation follows as logically as night follows day. Biron reappears, whole, vigorous, unharmed, a husband. Carlos kills Biron, Isabella kills herself, Carlos is taken to jail; the unfortunate Villeroy is left to contemplate widowerhood.

Some authorities are inclined to ascribe *The Provoked Husband*, first performed in 1739, to Colley Cibber, who wrote a piece called *The Careless Husband* in 1715. If these be the same play, the story tells how a wayward husband, harassed by unsatisfactory *affaires* with his wife's maid and a coquette with the engaging name of Lady Betty Modish, palms the lady off on a staunch upholder of matrimony, Lord Morelove, and returns to the charms of his wife's virtuous and dutiful bosom. This sounds more like a provoked wife than an incensed husband, but anything was possible on the early eighteenth-century stage and ways may have been found to adapt the situation.

There had been three plays with the title of *The Gamester*. One was written by Susannah Centlivre, an actress, who overcame a major fear of the theatre of her day by marrying Queen Anne's cook. The second, written by James Shirley, reputed to have been based on a tale in Margaret of Navarre's *Heptameron*, was first performed in 1683. The third, that in which Fanny appeared, was written by Edward Moore in 1753. As Dr. Allardyce Nicoll has said, it is a story of 'unrelieved misery.' It tells how Beverley, a weak man possessed by a mania for gambling, allows his passion to lead him, through the machinations of his false friend Stukely, to ruin. In a last desperate attempt to recoup his losses, Beverley steals his wife's jewels and uses them as the stake for gambling. His attempt fails and he loses the jewels. Charlotte, Beverley's sister, has a lover, Lewson, who discovers the part Stukely has played in ruining Beverley. Stukely, knowing that Lewson is about to expose him, arranges that Lewson shall be murdered and arranges the killing in such a way as to throw suspicion for the murder upon Beverley. Beverley takes poison, overcome with grief and worry. Before Moore allowed Beverley to die, he made him hear that a large amount of money has been bequeathed to him. This twist in the plot, revealing a vitality of construction uncommon in the eighteenth century, is the final drop of bitterness in Beverley's cup and he dies. Before the descent of the final curtain it is revealed that Lewson has not been killed and will presumably be united to Charlotte. Through this grim story the figure of Mrs. Beverley is seen attempting vainly to

save her husband, end his fatal passion for gambling, being betrayed and robbed, and only finally saved from a poverty in whose making she played no part. It is not a strong or even a good role. Young and pretty women were not permitted many opportunities in plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, particularly when their charm and inexperience carried the additional drawback of unquestioned virtue. When dealing with women, playwrights have always attained greater effect when portraying malignant evil than when sketching out simplicity and faithfulness.

It is not actually surprising that Fanny's dislike of a theatrical career increased, rather than diminished, under the spur of such plays. Any actress could have undertaken her roles in these pieces, and preferably one less hedged in with Kemble traditions, less intelligently interested in a search for truths and experience, less concerned with the ultra-feminine wiles which bothered the ladies she portrayed.

(5)

When the season ended Fanny had played continuously from the beginning, and Covent Garden had enjoyed the first continuously successful season it had known for years. Receipts for the nights on which she had appeared averaged from three hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds a night. When Charles sat down to work out his accounts for the season he found that, after meeting expenses, he could pay £13,000 off the theatre's debts.

Fanny had succeeded, beyond all their united hopes. The theatre's debt was appreciably less. She had taken home to her mother thirty pounds a week for the better part of eight months, around one thousand pounds. For a girl of nineteen years old, it was an auspicious beginning. Looking back at their own beginning, her parents had good reason to view the future with hope. Fanny had no reason to regret having taken the step she had done. She may well have viewed the prospect more hopefully; a writer could indulge his passion more easily with an assurance of capital to rely on. In addition, the social functions she attended put her in touch with interesting people who would read what she wrote. This was not to happen until two years later—when John Murray published *Francis I*, a play she wrote in 1827 in place of the historical novel she had contemplated, which was to have ten editions in England and six in America by 1833—but it was a beginning. Theatrical life had its compensations, Fanny learned. The prospect was bright, brighter than it had been for a long time, when the company started its provincial tour in the summer of 1832.

CHAPTER V

(1)

ONE of the most interesting features of Fanny's letters at this time is the record given of the parts of Britain in which she played. They provide a unique picture of a Britain thrumming with activity. The first stage of the Industrial Revolution was over; machinery was no longer a novelty; engineers and scientists were busy extending opportunities of mechanized industry whilst, in odd contrast, large areas of the country still lived and worked as they had for many hundreds of years. Fanny was acutely aware of the changes occurring around her; her interest is shown in many of the letters she wrote from the time she had visited Brunel's Thames Tunnel with her father.

The tour, which had been intended to start at Brighton, opened in Bath. From here, on 31st May, 1830, Fanny wrote to Harriet:

> 'I have owed you an answer, and a most grateful one, for some time past, for your kindness in writing me so long a letter as your last, but when I assure you that, what with leave-taking, trying on dresses, making purchases, etc., etc., and all the preparations for our summer tour, this is the first moment in which I have been able to draw a long breath for the last month, I am sure you will forgive me, and believe, notwithstanding my long silence, that I was made very happy indeed by your letter. . . . I was very sorry to leave my London audience. They welcomed my first appearance. They knew the history of our shipwrecked fortunes, and though perhaps not one individual amongst them would go a mile out of his way to serve us, there exists in them, taken collectively, a kind feeling and respect for my father, and an indulgent good will towards me, which I do not hope to find elsewhere. I like Bath very much; I have not been here since I was six years old, when I spent a year here in hopes of being *bettered* by my aunt, Mrs. Twiss. A most forlorn hope it was. I suppose in human annals there never existed a more troublesome little brat than I was for the first few years after my first appearance on this earthly stage.
>
> 'This town reminds me a little of Edinburgh. How glad I shall be to see Edinburgh once more! . . . I must tell you, though, of an instance of provincial prudery (delicacy, I suppose I ought to call it) which edified us not a little at rehearsal this morning. Mercutio [they were opening with *Romeo and Juliet*], on seeing the nurse and Peter, called out "A sail, a sail!" and terminated the speech in a significant whisper, which, being literally inaudible, my mother, who was with me on the stage, very innocently asked, "Oh, does the gentleman leave out the shirt and the smock?" upon which we were informed that "body-linen" was not so much as to be hinted at before a truly refined Bath audience.'

From Glasgow a month later she wrote to Mrs. Jameson:

'I am sitting at an inn window, in a dull, dark, handsome square in Glasgow. My fortnight in Edinburgh is over, and a short fortnight it has been, what with rehearsals, riding, sitting for my bust, and acting. . . .

'You will naturally expect me to say something of my theatrical experience in the modern Athens. Our houses have been very fine, our audiences (as is their national custom) very cold. But upon the whole I believe they were well pleased with us, notwithstanding the damping influences of the newspapers, which have one and all been unfavourable to me. The death-like stillness of the audience, as it afforded me neither rest nor stimulus, distressed me a good deal; which I think I need not tell you the criticisms did not. I was surprised in reading them to find how very generally their strictures were confined to my external disadvantages—my diminutive stature and defective features; and that these far-famed northern critics discussed these rather than what I should have expected them to bestow their consideration upon, the dramatic artist's conception of character, and his (or her) execution of that conception. But had their verdicts been still more severe, I have a sufficient consolation in two notes of Sir Walter Scott's, written to the editor of one of the papers, Ballantyne. . . .'

(On 17th June, Scott had written: 'Went last night to theatre and saw Miss Fanny Kemble's Isabella, which was a most creditable performance. It has much of the genius of Mrs. Siddons, her aunt. She wants her beautiful countenance, her fine form, and her matchless dignity of step and manner. On the other hand, Miss Kemble has very expressive though not regular features, and, what is worth it all, great energy mingled with and chastened by correct taste.')

Continuing the letter to Mrs. Jameson, Fanny wrote:

'Among the delightful occurrences of last week, I must record our breakfasting with Walter Scott. I was wonderfully happy. . . . The party was a small but interesting one; Sir Walter and his daughter Anne, his old friend Sir Adam Fergusson and Lady Fergusson, and Miss Ferrier, the authoress of *Marriage* and *Inheritance*, with both which capital books I hope, for your sake, you are acquainted. Sir Walter was most delightful, and I even forgot all awful sense of his celebrity in his kind, cordial, and almost affectionate manner towards me. He is exceedingly like all the engravings, pictures, and busts of him with which one is familiar, and it seems strange that so varied and noble an intellect should be expressed in the features of a shrewd, kindly, but not otherwise striking countenance.'

A few days later she again wrote to Mrs. Jameson, saying that the death of George IV had given the company a three-day rest. With Charles, and others, she had been to Loch Lomond and the entrance to Loch Long.

'A volume might be written on the mere colour of the water and give no idea of it . . . it was heavenly, and we had such a perfect day! I brought

away an appropriate nosegay from my trip, a white rose from Dumbarton, in memory of Mary Stuart, an oak branch from Loch Lomond, and a handful of heather, for which I fought with the bees on the rocky shore of Loch Long. I like my Glasgow audience better than my Edinburgh one; they are not so cold. I look for a pleasant audience in your country, for which we set out to-morrow, I believe.'

Dublin gave Fanny a great welcome. Large crowds gathered at the stage door every night to cheer her and her father. She was escorted back to her hotel by large bodyguards of Dublin gallants, who formed a triumphal archway when she stepped from her carriage. Lady Morgan, author of *The Wild Irish Girl*, gave a party in her honour. The visit to Ireland was memorable chiefly because she could see Harriet and spent some days with her at Ardgillan Castle, riding, walking over the hills and along the sands, bathing, and, above all, talking, as they had not talked since their meeting at Heath Farm. Subsequent letters show that Fanny would have preferred to stay with Harriet than continue her career. Writing from Liverpool, a few weeks later, she greeted a letter from Harriet with tears, and in her reply said:

'You will hardly imagine how irksome it was to me to be once more in my stage-trappings, in the glare of the theatre instead of the blessed sunshine in the country, to hear the murmur of congregated human beings instead of that sound of many waters, that wonderful sea-song, that is to me like the voice of a dear friend. I made a great effort to conquer this feeling of repugnance to my work, and thought of my dear Mrs. Harry [Siddons], whom I have seen, with a heart and mind torn with anxiety, leave poor Lizzy on what seemed almost a death-bed, to go and do her duty at the theatre.'

In the same letter appears a paragraph which reveals the way Fanny's spirit was shaping. Referring to conversations she had in Ireland with Harriet, she wrote:

'I humbly hope I *fear* as I ought, but it is so much easier for me to love than to fear, that my nature instinctively fastens on those aspects of religion which inspire confidence and impart support, rather than those which impress with dread. I was thinking the other day how constantly in all our prayers the loftiest titles of might are added to that Name of Names "Our Father" and yet his power is always less present to my mind than His mercy and love. You tell me I do not know you, and that may very well be, for one really *knows* no one; and when I reflect upon and attempt to analyse the various processes of my own rather shallow mind, and find them incomprehensible, I am only surprised that there should be so much mutual affection in a world where mutual knowledge and understanding are really impossible.'

It would seem that Fanny was becoming more than an unhappy girl with ideas. She was an unhappy woman with intelligence, at war with herself. Though young enough to encounter the problems of youth, she had already outgrown

the binding fears which hamper most people when the problems of maturity commence to multiply. She wanted to *know;* she wanted time to work out a scale of values; she wanted to grow and try to fit the world and herself into an understandable pattern. Tied to a career she did not like, which denied the opportunities she craved to use her brain in the way she wanted to use it, she found herself defeated, denied even an attempt at self-expression. She lacked the element which might have stabilized her and solved her perplexities: love. Flirtations she had had, but none had absorbed or guided her into accepting her life on the stage or provided a time when it would end. She went through her daily life unreconciled to living, seeking escape by probing for values, noting what happened in the world around her, and finding her main outlet in the letters to and from Harriet.

In the letter quoted above she tells her friend not to wish that Ardgillan was only fifteen miles from London, 'even for the sake of seeing you I would not bring you near the smoke and dirt and comparative confinement of such a situation; I would not take you from your sea and sky and trees even to have you within reach of me' and concluded with a footnote to the effect that 'I have not seen the railroad yet; if you do not write soon to me, we shall be gone to Manchester.'

The railroad mentioned was that from Liverpool to Manchester, then in its final stages of preparation and nearing the day of its opening. The iron way across Lancashire, a great manufacturing centre at one end, and a great port at the other, was to have great significance for the entire world. Fanny's account of the railroad and of the opening day provide the finest contemporary accounts. In them she displays a genuine and mature ability as a writer, her descriptions equal those of many great writers.

(2)

On 25th September, 1825, thirty-four coaches were first hauled over the Stockton-Darlington Railroad, a few months after George Stephenson had appeared in the box before members of the House of Commons to persuade them that a railroad between Liverpool and Manchester would not turn everyone in the locality into a screaming lunatic, prevent chickens from laying eggs, or cause cows to stampede to the public danger. Supported by Huskisson, president of the Board of Trade, the Bill for the railroad was passed in March the following year, and the railroad authorized for construction under Stephenson's supervision. Trials were held over various parts of the railroad, while competing engineers, with their own engines, got ready for the Rainhill Contests to be held in October, at which the general pattern for future locomotives was to be decided; Stephenson's entry, the 'Rocket,' gained its name when a newspaper drew a disparaging comment between Stephenson's claim for the locomotive and the war rockets with which Sir William Congreve set Copenhagen on fire from the sea in 1809 and Dantzig in 1813.

Fanny and Charles were playing in Liverpool while the final preparations for opening the railroad were in progress. On 26th August, 1830, Fanny wrote:

'My dear Harriet,

'A common sheet of paper is enough for love, but a foolscap extra can alone contain a railroad and my ecstasies. There was once a man, who was born at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who was a common coal-digger! this man had an immense constructiveness, which displayed itself in pulling his watch to pieces and putting it together again; in making a pair of white shoes when he happened to be some days without occupation; finally—here there is a great gap in my story—it brought him in the capacity of an engineer before a committee of the House of Commons, with his head full of plans for constructing a railroad from Liverpool to Manchester. It so happened that to the quickest and most powerful perceptions, to the most indefatigable industry and perseverance, and the most accurate knowledge of the phenomena of nature as they affect his peculiar labours, this man joined an utter want of the "gift of the gab." He could no more explain to others what he meant to do and how he meant to do it, than he could fly; and therefore the members of the House of Commons, after saying "There is rock to be excavated to a depth of more than sixty feet, there are embankments to be made nearly to the same height, there is a swamp of five miles in length to be traversed, in which if you drop an iron rod it sinks and disappears: how will you do all this?" and receiving no answer but a broad Northumberian "I can't tell you how I'll do it, but I can tell you I *will* do it," dismissed Stephenson as a visionary. Having prevailed upon a company of Liverpool gentlemen to be less incredulous, and having raised funds for his great undertaking, in December of 1826 the first spade was struck into the ground.

'And now I will give you an account of my yesterday's excursion. A party of sixteen persons was ushered into a large courtyard, where, under cover, stood several carriages of a peculiar construction, one of which was prepared for our reception. It was a long-bodied vehicle with seats placed across it, back to back; the one we were in had six of these benches and was a sort of uncovered *char-à-banc*. The wheels were placed upon two iron bands, which formed the road, and to which they are fitted, being so constructed as to slide along without any danger of hitching or becoming displaced, on the same principle as a thing sliding on a concave groove. The carriage was set in motion by a mere push, and, having received this impetus, rolled with us down an inclined plane into a tunnel which forms the entrance to the railroad. This tunnel is four hundred yards long (I believe) and will be lighted by gas. At the end of it we emerged from darkness, and, the ground becoming level, we stopped. There is another tunnel parallel with this, only much wider and longer, for it extends from the place which we had now reached, and where the steam-carriages start, and which is quite out of Liverpool, the whole way under the town, to the docks. This tunnel is for waggons and other heavy carriages; and as the engines which are to draw the trains along the railroad do not enter these tunnels, there is a large building at this entrance which is to be inhabited by steam-engines of a stationary turn of mind, and

different construction from the travelling ones, which are to propel the trains through the tunnels to the terminus in the town, without going out of their houses themselves. The length of the tunnel parallel to the one we passed through is (I believe) two thousand two hundred yards.

'I wonder if you are understanding one word of what I am saying all this while!

'We were introduced to the little engine which was to drag us along the rails. She (for they make these curious little fire-horses all mares) consisted of a boiler, a stove, a small platform, a bench, and behind the bench a barrel containing enough water to prevent her being thirsty for fifteen miles—the whole machine not bigger than a common fire-engine. She goes upon two wheels, which are her feet, and are moved by bright steel legs called pistons. These are propelled by steam, and in proportion as more steam is applied to the upper extremities (the hip-joints, I suppose) of these pistons, the faster they move the wheels; and when it is desirable to diminish the speed, the steam, which unless suffered to escape would burst the boiler, evaporates through a safety-valve into the air. The reins, bit, and bridle of this wonderful beast—a small handle which applies or withdraws the steam from its legs or pistons, so that a child could manage it. The coals, which are its oats, were under the bench, and there was a small glass tube affixed to the boiler, with water in it, which indicates by its fullness or emptiness when the creature wants water, which is immediately conveyed to it from its reservoirs. There is a chimney to the stove, but as they burn coke there is none of the dreadful black smoke which accompanies the progress of a steam-vessel. This snorting little animal, which I felt rather inclined to pat, was then harnessed to our carriage, and, Mr. Stevenson having taken me on the bench of the engine with him, we started at about ten miles an hour.

'The steam-horse being ill-adapted for going up and down hill, the road was kept at a certain level, and appeared sometimes to sink below the surface of the earth and sometimes to rise above it. Almost at starting it was cut through the solid rock, which formed a wall on either side of it, about sixty feet high. You can't imagine how strange it seemed to be journeying on thus, without any visible cause of progress other than the magical machine, with its flying white breath and rhythmical, unvarying pace, between these rocky walls, which are already clothed with moss and ferns and grasses. When I reflected that these great masses of stone had been cut asunder to allow our passage thus far below the surface of the earth, I felt as if no fairy tale was ever half so wonderful as what I saw. Bridges were thrown from side to side across the top of these cliffs, and the people looking down upon us from them seemed like pygmies standing in the sky.

'I must be more concise, though, or I shall want room. We were to go only fifteen miles, that distance being sufficient to show the speed of the engine and take us on to the most beautiful and wonderful object on the road. After proceeding through this rocky defile, we presently found ourselves raised upon embankments ten or twelve feet high. We then came to a moss or swamp of considerable extent, on which no human feet could tread without sinking, and yet it bore the road which bore us. This had been the great

stumbling-block in the minds of the committee of the House of Commons, but Mr. Stephenson had succeeded in overcoming it. A foundation of hurdles, or, as he called it, basket-work, was thrown over the morass, and the interstices were filled with moss and other elastic matter. Upon this the clay and soil were laid down and the road does float, for we passed over it at the rate of five and twenty miles an hour, and saw the stagnant swamp trembling on the surface of the soil on either side of us. I hope you understand me. The embankment had gradually been rising higher and higher, and in one place, where the soil was not settled enough to form banks, Stephenson had constructed artificial ones of wood-work, over which the mounds of earth would rot, for he said that though the wood-work would rot, before it did so the banks of earth which covered it would have been sufficiently consolidated to support the road.

'We had now come fifteen miles and stopped where the road traversed a wide and deep valley. Stephenson made me alight and led me down to the bottom of this ravine, over which, in order to keep his road level, he had thrown a magnificent viaduct of nine arches, the middle one of which is seventy feet high, through which we saw the whole of this beautiful little valley. It was lovely and wonderful beyond all words. Here he told me many curious things respecting this ravine; how he believed the Mersey had once rolled through it; how the soil had proved so unfavourable for the foundations of his bridge that it was built upon piles which had been driven into the earth to an enormous depth; how, while digging for a foundation, he had come to a tree bedded in the earth fourteen feet below the surface of the ground; how tides are caused, and how another flood might be caused; all of which I have remembered and noted down at much greater length than I can here enter upon it. He explained to me the whole construction of the steam-engine, and said he could soon make a famous engineer of me, which, considering the wonderful things he has achieved, I dare not say is impossible. His way of explaining himself is peculiar, but very striking, and I understood, without difficulty, all that he said to me. We then rejoined the rest of the party, and the engine having received its supply of water, the carriage was placed behind it, for it cannot turn, and was set off at its utmost speed, thirty-five miles an hour, swifter than a bird flies (for they tried the experiment with a snipe).

'You cannot conceive what that sensation of cutting the air was; the motion is as smooth as possible too. I could either have read or written; and as it was, I stood up, and with my bonnet off "drank the air before me." The wind, which was strong, or perhaps the force of our own thrusting against it, absolutely weighed my eyelids down. When I closed my eyes this sensation of flying was quite delightful, and strange beyond description, yet, strange as it was, I had a perfect sense of security and not the slightest fear. At one time, to exhibit the power of the engine, having met another steam-carriage which was unsupplied with water, Mr. Stephenson caused it to be fastened in front of ours; moreover, a waggon laden with timber was also chained to us, and thus propelling the idle steam-engine, and dragging the loaded waggon which was beside it, and our own carriage full of people behind, this brave

little she-dragon of ours flew on. Farther on she met three carts, which, being fastened in front of her without the slightest delay or difficulty. When I add that this pretty little creature can run with equal facility either backwards or forwards, I believe I have given you an account of all her capacities.

'Now for a word or two about the master of all these marvels, with whom I am most horribly in love. He is a man from fifty to fifty-five years of age. [Stephenson was then forty-nine.] His face is fine, though careworn, and bears an expression of deep thoughtfulness. His mode of explaining his ideas is peculiar and very original, striking, and forcible. Although his accent indicates strongly his north country birth, his language has not the slightest touch of vulgarity or coarseness. He has certainly turned my head.

'Four years have sufficed to bring this great undertaking to an end. The railroad will be opened upon the 15th of next month. The Duke of Wellington is coming down to be present on the occasion, and, I suppose, what with the thousands of spectators and the novelty of the spectacle, there will never have been a scene of more striking interest. The whole cost of the work (including the engine and carriages) will have been eight hundred and thirty thousand pounds. It is already worth double that sum. The directors have kindly offered us three places for the opening, which is a great favour, for people are bidding almost anything for a place, I understand; but I fear we shall be obliged to decline them, as my father is most anxious to take Henry over to Heidelberg before our season of work in London begins, which will take place on the first of October.

'I think there is every possibility of our having a very prosperous season. London will be particularly gay this winter, and the King and Queen, it is said, are fond of dramatic entertainments, so that I hope we shall get on well. You will be glad to hear that our houses here (in Liverpool) have been very fine, and that to-night, Friday, which was my benefit, the theatre was crowded in every corner. We do not play here any more, but on Monday, we open at Manchester. . . .'

An error occurs in the letter, though Fanny was unaware of it at the time. She *was* present with Charles when the railroad opened. After leaving Liverpool they played in Manchester where they stayed with Lord and Lady Wilton. They had to leave to fulfil engagements in Birmingham, but returned to Manchester, from where Fanny wrote Harriet a description of what happened when the railroad had opened five days before:

'You probably have by this time heard and read accounts of the opening of the railroad, and the fearful accident which occurred at it, for the papers are full of nothing else. The accident you mention did occur, but though the unfortunate man who was killed bore Mr. Stephenson's name, he was not related to him.

'I will tell you something of the events on the 15th, as, though you may be acquainted with the circumstances of poor Mr. Huskisson's death, none but an eye-witness of the whole scene can form a conception of it. [Huskisson was the former president of the Board of Trade.]

'I told you that we had had places given to us, and it was the main purpose of our returning from Birmingham to Manchester to be present at what promised to be one of the most striking events in the scientific annals of our country.

'We started on Wednesday last, to the number of about eight hundred people, in carriages constructed as I before described to you. The most intense curiosity and excitement prevailed. Though the weather was uncertain, enormous crowds of densely packed people lined the road, shouting and waving hats and handkerchiefs as we flew by them. [The start had been made from Liverpool.] What with the sight and sound of these cheering multitudes and the tremendous velocity with which we were borne past them, my spirits rose to the true champagne height, and I never enjoyed anything so much as the first hour of our progress. I had been unluckily separated from my mother in the first distribution of places, but by an exchange of seats which she was enabled to make she rejoined me when I was at the height of my ecstasy, which was considerably dampened by finding that she was frightened to death, and intent upon nothing but devising means of escaping from a situation which appeared to her to threaten with instant annihilation herself and all her travelling companions. While I was chewing the cud of this disappointment, which was rather bitter, as I had expected her to be as delighted as myself with our excursion, a man flew by us, calling out through a speaking-trumpet to stop the engine, for that somebody in the director's carriage had sustained an injury. We were all stopped accordingly, and presently a hundred voices were heard exclaiming that Mr. Huskisson was killed. The confusion that ensued is indescribable: the calling out from carriage to carriage to ascertain the truth, the contrary reports which were sent back to us, the hundred questions eagerly uttered at once, and the repeated and urgent demands for surgical assistance, created a sudden turmoil that was quite sickening. At last we distinctly ascertained that the unfortunate man's thigh was broken. From Lady Wilton, who was in the duke's carriage, and within three yards of the spot where the accident happened, I had the following details, the horror of witnessing which we were spared through our situation behind the great carriage. The engine had stopped to take in a supply of water, and several of the gentlemen in the director's carriage had jumped out to look about them. Lord Wilton, Count Batthyany, Count Matuscewitz, and Mr. Huskisson among the rest were standing talking on the middle of the road, when an engine on the other line, which was parading up and down merely to show its speed, was seen coming down upon them like lightning. The most active of those in peril sprang back into their seats. Lord Wilton saved his life only by rushing behind the Duke (of Wellington's) carriage, and Count Matuscewitz had but just leaped into it, with the engine all but touching his heels as he did so. Poor Mr. Huskisson, less active from the effects of age and ill health, bewildered too, by the frantic cries of "Stop the engine! Clear the track!" that resounded on all sides, completely lost his head, looked helplessly to the right and left, and was instantaneously prostrated by the fatal machine, which dashed down like a thunderbolt upon him, and passed over his leg, smashing and mangling it in the most horrible way. (Lady Wilton

said she distinctly heard the crushing of the bone.) So terrible was the effect of the appalling incident that, except for that ghastly "crushing" and poor Mr. Huskisson's piercing shriek, not a sound was heard or a word uttered among the immediate spectators of the catastrophe. Lord Wilton was the first to raise the poor sufferer, and calling to aid his surgical skill, which is considerable, he tied up the severed artery, and for a time, at least, prevented death by loss of blood. Mr. Huskisson was then placed in a carriage with his wife and Lord Wilton, and the engine, having been detached from the director's carriage, conveyed them to Manchester.

'So great was the shock produced upon the whole party by this event that the Duke of Wellington declared his intention not to proceed, but return immediately to Liverpool. However, upon its being represented to him that the whole population of Manchester had turned out to witness the procession, and that a disappointment might give rise to riots and disturbances, he consented to go on, and gloomily enough the rest of the journey was accomplished.

'We had intended to return to Liverpool by the railroad, but Lady Wilton, who seized upon me in the midst of the crowd, persuaded us to accompany her home, which we gladly did. Lord Wilton did not return till past ten o'clock, at which hour he brought the intelligence of Mr. Huskisson's death. I need not tell you of the sort of whispering awe which this event threw over our whole circle, and yet, great as was the horror excited by it, I could not help feeling how evanescent the effect of it was after all. The shuddering terror of seeing our fellow-creature thus struck down by our side, and the breathless thankfulness for our own preservation, rendered the first evening of our party at Heaton almost solemn; but the next day the concourse became a subject of earnest, it is true, but free discussion, and after that, was alluded to with almost as little apparent feeling as if it had not passed before our eyes and within the space of a few hours. . . .

'Our Sunday at Heaton terminated with much solemn propriety by Lord Wilton reading aloud the evening prayers to the whole family, visitors, and servants assembled; a ceremony which, combined and contrasted with so much of the pomps and vanities of the world, gave me a pleasant feeling towards these people, who live in the midst of them without forgetting better things. . . .' (20th September, 1830.)

In later years she added a footnote to the story with a description of how the journey, which had begun in good will and excitement and later marred by tragedy, ended with a demonstration of hatred and ill will. The sky became overcast as the train neared Manchester, rain was falling when they reached the city. Thousands of people had assembled to watch their arrival. Not friendly-disposed or pleased people, but men and women who were frightened and showed their fear in an outburst of anger and ugliness. The people of Manchester feared the railroad, believing it would even further harm their position, worsen their already terrible conditions. The year was only a few away from that when Disraeli would describe an outlying Manchester suburb in the following words: 'As you advanced, leaving behind you long lines of little dingy tenements, with

infants lying about the road, you expected every moment to emerge into some streets and encounter buildings bearing some correspondence, in their size and comfort, to the considerable population swarming and busied around you. Nothing of the kind. There were no public buildings of any sort; no churches, chapels, town-hall, institute, theatre; and the principal streets in the heart of the town in which were situated the coarse and grim shops . . . were equally narrow, and if possible more dirty. At every fourth or fifth house, alleys seldom above a yard wide, and streaming with filth, opened out of the street. . . . Here, during the days of business, the sound of the hammer and the file never ceased, amid gutters of abomination, and piles of foulness, and stagnant pools of filth; reservoirs of leprosy and plague, whose exhalations were sufficient to taint the atmosphere of the whole of the kingdom and fill the country with fever and pestilence.' The cellar population of the city was mounting to the level of 18,000 men, women and children, which it would have become when the Royal Health of Towns Commission issued its report fifteen years later. When the first train arrived from Liverpool, carrying in its most important coach one of the most disliked men of the time, the Duke of Wellington, the people, who had suffered much, and were to suffer more, gave vent to their anger in no uncertain style. In Fanny's words:

> 'Groans and hisses greeted the carriage, full of influential personages, in which the Duke of Wellington sat. High above the grim and grimy crowd of scowling faces a loom had been erected, at which sat a tattered, starved-looking weaver, evidently set there as a representative man, to protest against this triumph of machinery, and the gain and glory which the wealthy Liverpool and Manchester men were likely to derive from it. The contrast between our departure from Liverpool and our arrival at Manchester was one of the most striking things I ever witnessed. The news of Mr. Huskisson's fatal accident spread immediately, and his death, which did not occur until the evening, was anticipated by rumour. A terrible cloud covered this great national achievement, and its success, which in every respect was complete, was atoned for to the Nemesis of good fortune by the sacrifice of the first financial statesman of the country.'

A gloomy finale to one of the most important days in the history of the industrial age.

In March the following year, in a letter to Harriet, Fanny completed the record with a story she had just heard about Huskisson. She had been with Charles to see a portrait bust of herself executed by Macdonald and had seen one of Huskisson standing beside it:

> 'I heard a curious thing of him to-day. It seems that on the night before the opening of the railroad, as he was sitting with some friends, he said, "I cannot tell what ails me; I have a strange weight on my spirits; I am sure something dreadful will happen to-morrow; I wish it were over;" and that when they recapitulated all the precautions, and all the means that had been

taken for security, comfort and pleasure, all he replied was, "I wish to God it were over."

'There is something awful in these stories of presentiments that always impresses me deeply—this warning shadow, projected by no perceptible object, falling darkly and chilly over one; this indistinct whisper of destiny of which one hears the sound without distinguishing the sense; this muffled tread of Fate approaching us.'

Some romantics have attempted to imagine a love affair between Fanny and Stephenson. They offer as proof her comment upon him in the letter written from Liverpool, and add that he sent her flowers while she was performing in Manchester. The story does not bear examination. It is a pure figment of the imagination, and need not be heeded.

At the time that Fanny became acquainted with the latest feature of the machine age, she was still able to enjoy the spectacle of old customs. From Birmingham she wrote to Harriet, on 7th September, 1830, a description of a centuries-old ceremony which occurred while they stayed with the Wiltons:

'I must tell you of a curious little piece of *ancientry* which I saw at Heaton, which greatly delighted me—a "rush-bearing." At a certain period of the year, generally the beginning of autumn, it was formerly the wont in some parts of Lancashire to go round with sundry rustic mummeries to all the churches and strew them with rushes. The religious intention of the custom has passed away, but a pretty rural procession, which I witnessed, still keeps up the memory of it hereabouts. I was sitting at my window looking out over the lawn, which slopes charmingly on every side down to the house, when the still summer air was suddenly filled with the sound of distant shouts and music, and presently the quaint pageantry drew in sight. First came an immense waggon piled with rushes in a stacklike form, on the top of which sat two men holding huge nosegays. This was drawn by a team of Lord Wilton's finest farm-horses, covered with scarlet cloths and decked with ribbons and bells and flowers. After this came twelve country lads and lasses dancing the real old morris dance, their handkerchiefs flying, in all the rustic elegance of apparel which they could command for the occasion. After them followed a very good village band, and then a species of flowery canopy under which walked a man and woman covered with finery, who, Lord Wilton told me, represented Adam and Eve. The procession closed with a *fool* fantastically dressed out and carrying the classical bladder at the end of his stick. They drew up before the house and danced their morris dance for us. The scraps of old poetry which came into my head, the contrast between this pretty picture of a bygone time and the modern but by no means unpicturesque group assembled under the portico, filled my mind with the pleasantest ideas. I was quite sorry when the rural pageant wound up the woody heights again and the last shout and peal of music came back across the sunny lawn. I am very glad I saw it.

'I have visited too, Hopwood Hall, an enchanting old house in the neighbourhood of Heaton, some parts of which are as old as the reign of Edward

the First. The gloomy but comfortable oak rooms, the beautiful and curious carving, some of which might afford one days of entertaining study, the low latticed windows and intricate, winding, up-and-down passages, contrasted and combined with all the elegant adornments of modern luxury, and the pretty country in which the house is situated, all delighted me.'

And, in a closing note:

'I have not been altogether well for the last few days, and am feeling tired and out of spirits. If I can get a few days' quiet enjoyment of the country at Heaton, I shall feel fitter for my winter work than I do now.' (7th September, 1830.)

At Heaton she wrote to Mrs. Jameson a few days later, giving an account of preparations for her return to Manchester, and gave this account of other exploits:

'I have seen the fine, picturesque town of Chester. I have seen Liverpool, its docks, its cemetery, its railroad, on which I was flown away with by a steam-engine at the rate of five and thirty miles an hour. I have seen Manchester, power-looms, spinning-jennies, cotton factories, etc. I have stayed at the pleasant modern mansion of Heaton. I have visited Hopwood Hall, built in the reign of Edward the First, and still retaining its carved old oaken chimneys and panelled chambers and latticed windows, and intricate ups and downs of internal architecture, to present use apparently as purposeless and inconvenient as if one was living in a cat's-cradle. . . . I have seen Birmingham, its button-making, pin-making, plating, stamping, etc. I have seen Aston Hall, an old house two miles from town, and two hundred from everything in it, where Charles the First slept after the battle of Edge Hill, and whose fine old staircase still retains the marks of Cromwell's cannon—which house, moreover, possesses an oaken gallery one hundred and odd feet long, hung with old portraits, one of the most delightful apartments imaginable.

'How I did sin in envy, and long for that nice room to walk up and down and dream and poetize in. But as I know of no earthly way of compassing this desirable acquisition but offering myself in exchange for it to its present possessor (who might not think well of the bargain), *il n'y faut plus penser.* Moreover, as the grapes are sour, I conclude that upon the whole it might not be an advantageous one for me.' (18th September, 1830.)

And so, the first tour came to its end. In September Fanny returned to London. Upon her return she wrote to Harriet, inviting her to visit the capital, 'that huge mass of matter for thought and observation,' for a holiday.

(3)

In November, shortly after the new season at Covent Garden had started, Fanny was telling Harriet:

'Our own country is in a perilous state of excitement and these troubled times make politicians of us all. Of course the papers will have informed you of the risings in Kent and Sussex; London itself is in an unquiet state that suggests the heaving of a volcano before eruption. It is said that the Duke of Wellington must resign. I am ignorant, but it appears to me that whenever he does it will be a bad day's work for England. The alarm and anxiety of the aristocracy is extreme, and exhibits itself, even as I have had opportunity of observing it in society, in the half-angry, half-frightened tone of their comments on public events. If one did not sympathize with their apprehensions, their mode of expressing them would sometimes be amusing.

'The aspect of public affairs is injurious to the theatre. These graver interests thin our houses while they crowd the Houses of Parliament. However, when we played *The Provoked Husband* before the King and Queen the other night, the theatre was crammed from floor to ceiling, and presented a most beautiful *coup d'œil*. I have just come out in Mrs. Haller. It seems to have pleased the people very much. I need not tell you how much I dislike the play. It is the quintessence of trashy sentimentalism. But our audience cry and sob at it till we can hardly hear ourselves speak on the stage, and the public in general rejoices in what the servant-maids call "something deep." My father acts the Stranger with me, which makes it very trying to my nerves, as I mix up all my own personal feelings for him with my acting, and the sight of his anguish and sense of his displeasure is really dreadful to me, though it is only about "stuff and nonsense" after all.' (8th November, 1830.)

A week later she wrote:

'Mrs. Haller is going on very well. It is well spoken on, I am told, and upon the whole it seems to have done me credit, though I am surprised to hear it has, for there is nothing in the part that gives me the least satisfaction. My next character, I hear, is to be of a very different order of frailty—Calista, in *The Fair Penitent*. However odious both play and part are, there are powerful situations in it and many opportunities for fine acting, but I am afraid I am quite unequal to such a *terpissime* termagant, with whom my aunt did such tremendous things.'. (14th November, 1830.)

In later years she added: 'My performance of *The Fair Penitent* was entirely ineffective and did neither me nor the theatre any service. The play itself is a feeble adaptation of Massinger's powerful drama of *The Fatal Dowry*. . . .'

The autumn proved a busy one. In addition to acting, rehearsing plays, new to her at least, and having Harriet arrive, she was busy waiting on John Murray for publication of her first play. The first letter written to Harriet after her return to Ireland was filled with a number of small items concerning members of the

Kemble family and preparations for the Christmas festivities. The one which followed—any others which may have been written have been destroyed—was written a few days after the new year and included the following:

'Dear Harriet, the pleasant excitement of your society assisted the natural contentedness or indifference of my disposition to throw aside many reflections upon myself and others, the life I lead and its various annoyances, which have been unpleasantly forced upon me since your departure; and when I say that I do not feel happy, you will not count it merely the blue-devilish fancy of a German brain or an English (that is bilious) stomach.

'I have a feeling, not of dissatisfaction or discontent so much as of sadness and weariness, though I struggle always and sometimes pretty successfully to rouse myself from it.

'You say you wish to know what we did on Christmas Day. I'll tell you. In the morning I went to church, after which I came home and copied *The Star of Saville* [the play she was writing] till dinner-time. After dinner my mother, who had proposed spending the evening at our worthy pastor's, Mr. Sterky's, finding my father disinclined for that exertion, remained at home and went to sleep; my father likewise, Dall likewise, Henry likewise; and I copied on at my play till bedtime: *voilà*. On Monday, contrary to my expectations, I had to play Euphrasia before the pantomime. You know we were to spend Christmas Eve at my aunt Siddons's. We had a delightful evening and I was very happy. My aunt came down from the drawing-room (for we danced in the dining-room on the ground floor), and sat among us. You cannot think how nice and pretty it was to see her surrounded by her clan, more than three dozen strong. Some of them so handsome, and many with a striking likeness to herself, either in feature or expression. Mrs. Harry and Cecy danced with us and we enjoyed ourselves very much. . . . Thursday I acted Mrs. Townley, and acted it abominably ill, and was much mortified to find that Cecilia had got my cousin Harry to chaperon her two boys to the play that night; because, as he never before went to see me act, it is rather provoking that the only time he did so I should have sent him to sleep, which he gallantly assured me I did. I do not find cousins so much more polite than brothers (one's natural born plagues). Harry's compliment to my acting had quite a brotherly tenderness, I think. . . .' (3rd January, 1831.)

Harry Siddons was the officer who had her name engraved on his sword. Three days later, again to Harriet, she wrote:

'I have only time to say two words to you, for I am in the midst of preparations for our flight to Brighton to-morrow. . . .'

The Brighton which Fanny visited that winter for a short engagement was a very different resort from what it had been a few years earlier.

The days had gone when London dandies and rakes, racecourse mobs, husband-hunting damsels and their gaily caparisoned mothers, crowded the town in search of those robust forms of amusement which later generations were to despise and

fear as un-English; when sturdy damsels picked up their skirts, hoops, petticoats, sacques, polonaises, and fled in riotous dishevelment in races to win new bonnets to grace their chignons and nape ringlets; stalwarts of the nobility hied them, and the same sturdy maidens, to the Downs to partake of exhausting games of cricket and other wild pastimes; when George IV, as Prince of Wales, divided his time between adding Hindu-style galleries, Moorish arches, Chinese rooms, Scagliola marble decorations, bright green staircases, French blue corridors, the vivid yellow library, gilt dragons, ormolu pedestals, glass lotus flower decorations, and bamboo curtain poles, to the Rotunda (now the Dome), and the soft, white, ample, finally captive, flesh of Mrs. Fitzherbert. Gone, too, were the eccentrics who had enlivened that earlier age, such as the Green Man, Henry Cope, he who showed remarkable singleness of purpose by wearing green pantaloons, green waistcoat, green frock coat, green cravat, who ate nothing but greens, vegetables and fruit, who had his rooms painted green, with green arm-chairs, tables, bed and curtains, whose gig was green, along with green portmanteau, gloves, whip, handkerchief, and gold watch-chain with green seals fastened to the green buttons of a green waistcoat, and who had finally mistaken his way one day and tripped over a green cliff, out of this world into the glamorous evergreen legends of Brighton.

Gone, alas! all gone. Brighton had devoted its soul to the excitements of suburbia, its energies to the chase for worthiness. Excitements still abounded, though of noticeably calmer nature. There were boats, bazaars, and band concerts. Libraries had a vogue, particularly those with books 'especially such as are calculated for the fair sex,' to quote the official *Guide for* 1828. Early to bed was the watchword for curbing any tendency to profligacy caused by the heady sea air. Concerts ended sharply at ten o'clock 'when the whole became tranquil and enveloped in the sober garment of night.' This ominous wording was sufficient to warn away descendants of the rakes and roués who might have been tempted to take a wayward step towards Brighton in search of revelry. Distractions were afforded, but mild, not too disturbing to the senses or sensibilities. There were 'capital telescopes' through which to contemplate the Channel and winsome young ladies beguiled visitors with 'very sweet and silvery tones,' for singing, at 8s. a month; and far out at sea above 'the depths of ocean . . . lifting its graceful form above the retiring billows' was the Chain Pier, clamorous with booths, gingerbread stalls, and other amusements. But Brighton was quiet, quiet with the stillness of those who take themselves seriously, quieter than it had been since it first attracted royal patronage. In 1831 it was preparing for the arrival of William IV and Queen Adelaide, of which event a picture remains in the Pavilion, depicting the triumphal archway of accession and recording the occasion with the words 'The above beautiful object, clothed with Foliage, Flowers, and variegated lamps, in the midst of the Standard of England, a body of Sailors in Blue Jackets, White Trowsers, arranged among them, the space in Front filled with Charity Children.' The inclusion of Charity Children was a symptom—Brighton was bright with good works.

The first theatre in Brighton had been a converted barn, opened by Johnson in 1764, with notices that paid someone or other a decorous compliment, namely, that matinées started at one o'clock though 'any morning so wet as to prevent

gentry from riding out, they will begin at twelve and furnish proper amusement till two.' The first theatre proper opened in North Street ten years later and moved in a short time to Duke Street. Sarah Siddons had played there, and Mrs. Jordan, Kean, and Macready. Even in its quieter years, Brighton found a need to enliven Shakespeare's plays with other distractions. There were scenes on *The Death of Nelson*, while M. Gouffe entranced everyone with his 'agile evolutions as the Brazilian Ape,' and horses trotted nobly to supply equine reality to the evolutions of *Bluebeard*.

Fanny wrote no letter to Harriet whilst at Brighton but upon her return supplied the following information of her own visit to this placid backwater of a more glamorous era:

'We got into Brighton at half-past four, and had just time to dine, dress, and go to the theatre, where we were to act *The Stranger*. The house was very full indeed, but my reception was not quite what I had expected. Whether they were disappointed in my dress (Mrs. Haller being traditionally clothed in droopacious white muslin, and I dressing her in grey silk, which is both stiff and dull-looking, as I think it should be), or whether, which I think still more likely, they were disappointed in my "personal appearance," which, as you know, is neither tragical nor heroic, I know not, but I thought their welcome rather cold but the truth is, I believe my London audience spoils me for every other. However, the play went off admirably and I believe everybody was satisfied, not excepting the manager, who assured me so full and *enthusiastic* a house had not been seen in Brighton for many years.

'Our rooms at the inn (the Old Ship) looked out upon the sea, but it was so foggy when we entered Brighton that although I perceived the *motion* of the waves through the mist that hung over them, their colour and every object along the shore was quite indistinct. The next morning was beautiful. Dall and I ran down to the beach before breakfast. There are no sands, unluckily, but we stood ankle-deep in the shingle, watching the ebbing tide and sniffing the sweet salt air for a long time with great satisfaction. After breakfast we rehearsed *The Provoked Husband* and from the theatre proceeded to take a walk. . . .

'All this was very fine, but still it was streets and houses. There were crowds of gay people parading up and down, looking as busy about nothing and as full of themselves as if the great awful sea had not been close beside them. In fact, I was displeased with the levity of their deportment, and the contrast of all that fashionable frivolity with the grandest of all natural objects seems to me incongruous and discordant. I was so annoyed at finding myself by the seaside and yet still surrounded with all the glare and gaiety of London, that I think I wished myself at the bottom of the cliff and Brighton at the bottom of the sea. However, we walked on and on, beyond the Parade, beyond the town, till we had nothing but the broad open downs to contrast with the broad open sea. Then I was completely happy. I gave my muff to my father and my fur tippet to Dall, for the sun shone powerfully on the heights, and I walked and ran along the edge of the cliffs, gazing and wondering and enjoying the solemn sound and brilliant sight, and the nervous excitement

of a slight sense of fear as I peeped over at the depth below me. From this diversion, however, my father called me away, and, to console me for not allowing me to run the risk of being dashed to pieces, offered to run a race up a small hill with me, and beat me hollow.

'We had walked about four miles when we halted at one of the Preventive Service stations to look about us. The tide had not yet come in, but its usual height when up was indicated, first by a delicate, waving fringe of sea-weed, like very bright green moss, and then, nearer in shore, by an incrustation of chalk washed from the cliffs, which formed a deep embossed silver embroidery along the coast as far as the eye could see. The sunshine was dazzling, and its light on the detached masses of milky chalk which lay far beneath us made them appear semi-transparent, like fragments of alabaster or carnelian. I was wishing that I could but get down the cliff, when a worthy sailor appeared toiling up it, and I discovered his winding staircase cut in the great chalk wall, down which I proceeded without further ado. I was a little frightened, for the steps were none of the most regular or convenient. I felt as if I were hanging (and at an uncomfortable distance from either) between heaven and earth. I got down safely, however, and ran to the water's edge, danced a galop on one smooth little sand island, waited till the tide, which was coming up, just touched my toes, gave it a kick of cowardly defiance, and then showed it a fair pair of heels and scrambled up the cliff again, very much enchanted with my expedition.

'I think a fight with smugglers up that steep staircase at night, with a heavy sea rolling and roaring close under it, would be glorious!

'When I reached the top my father said it was time to go home, so we returned. The Parade was crowded like Hyde Park in the height of the season, and when I was once out of the crowd and could look down upon it from our windows as it promenaded up and down, I never saw anything gayer. Carriages of every description—most of them open—cavalcades of ladies and gentlemen riding to and fro, throngs of smart bonnets and fine dresses, and beyond all this the high tide, with one broad crimson path across it, thrown by the sun, looking as if it led into some enchanted world beyond the waters. . . .

'Our house at the theatre that night was very fine. And now, as you are perhaps tired of Brighton, you will not be sorry to get home with me. . . . We were to start for London Sunday morning at ten (the journey took six hours) and my father had taken three inside places in a coach, which was to call for us at our inn. I ran down to the beach and had a few moments alone there. It was a beautiful morning, and the fishing boats were one by one putting out into the calmest sleepy sea. I longed to ask to be taken on board one of them, but I was summoned away to the coach, and found on reaching it that the fourth place being occupied by a sickly-looking woman with a sickly-looking child nearly as big as herself in her lap, my father, notwithstanding the coldness of the morning, had put himself on the outside. I went to sleep ; from which blessed refuge of the wretched I was recalled by a powerful and indescribable smell, which, seizing me by the nose, naturally

induced me to open my eyes. Mother and daughter were each devouring a lump of black, strong, greasy plum cake ; as a specific, I presume, against (or for?) sickness in a stage-coach.'

(4)

Fanny's diary and correspondence in the following few months were crowded with social engagements. She was the foremost actress of the London stage. Doors long open to her father, her aunt and uncle, and through which she had passed as being her father's daughter, now opened to her in her own right. She visited most of the fashionable homes for dinner. She went to balls. She was with this or that party attending the theatre. She met a quantity of the leading figures of the day; their names stud her letters like hundreds-and-thousands sprinkled over a child's birthday cake. This feature of her letters can be eschewed. Nothing of Fanny or her times can be learned from it; great names are always surrounded by those of society, though the reverse is not always true: and finally it is heavy going to plough through the fashionable register's minutiæ of any age.

The spring brought Fanny great happiness. In a letter written to Harriet in March she exclaimed:

> 'Why are you not here to kiss and congratulate me? I am so proud and happy! Mr. Murray has given me four hundred and fifty pounds for my play alone! The other things he does not wish to publish with it. Only think of it—was there ever such publishing munificence! My father has the face to say *it is not enough*! but looks so proud and pleased that his face alone shows it is *too much* by a great deal; my mother is enchanted. I am so happy, so thankful for this prosperous result of my work, so delighted at earning so much, so surprised and charmed to think that what gave me nothing but pleasure in the doing has brought me such an after-harvest of profit; it is almost too good to be true, and yet it is true.' (9th March, 1831.)

That was the true Fanny.

Through the season she acted a number of new roles, the most important being the part of Bianca in Milman's *Fazio*. She performed as Lady Macbeth, Mrs. Haller, Juliet, and Isabella. She read a great deal; she told Harriet that Burns's passions were so violent that he seems to me in that respect to have been rather a subject for poetry than a poet', and later, that 'I do not believe that to be sublime is in the power of a woman, any more than to be logical.' Of Byron, whose verses she had 'devoured like raspberry tarts', she wrote, 'I now believe that there is a great deal of unreality in those sentiments to which the charm of his verses lends an appearance of truth and depth . . . he has written immensely for mere effect; all young people read him, and young people are not apt to analyse closely what they feel strongly. . . .' A disagreement with Harriet showed that her understanding was growing:

'You say that we love intellect. I do not agree with you; I do not think intellect excites love. I do not even think that it increases our love for those we do love, though it adds admiration to our affection. I certainly do admire intellect immensely. Mental power, allied to moral power, goodness, is a force to uphold the universe.'

She fell out of love with Lord Melbourne and in love with Lord Ossulston, Lord Tankerville's son, 'one of the most beautiful creatures of the male sex' she ever saw. She was caught up in a private party's amateur theatricals, when a group of young society people—the Leveson-Gowers, Henry Greville, Augustus Craven, St. Aubyn, and others—arranged to perform *Hernani*, at Bridgewater House, and rehearsed at Oatlands, the Leveson-Gowers' home outside Weybridge. An attempt has been made by some to link Fanny in a romantic entanglement with Craven, due to a comment in a letter written some years afterwards, when Craven introduced his wife to Fanny, who commented to Harriet, 'She sought me with apparent cordiality and I had no reason whatever for avoiding her.' Despite the significant 'whatever' there seems little reason to presume that a romantic relationship, if it existed, ever amounted to more than an 'amateur dramatic romance' between two young unattached people who enjoyed playing opposite each other. The period of youth would be sadly dull without such bright flashes in the everyday pan and very gruesome if each flash was mistaken by others for the thunder-clap of domesticity. Fanny had flirtations, it may be prayed, but they were flirtations, not the sultry empurpled passions they have been surmised.

At home the year brought some alarum and excursion about another member of the family. Brother John, like his father and uncle, had been packed off abroad to study for Holy Orders. He had written from Spain to say he had joined General Torrijos and a party of Spanish exiles in an attempt to overthrow Ferdinand VII. One of the British party with John was Alfred Tennyson: young British poets have always displayed a penchant for becoming involved in other nations' quarrels. Most members of the party soon wearied of a hopeless cause, but John stayed on. His great friend, Richard Trench, returned from Spain and while passing through London, called to see the Kembles with news of John. Trench was on his way, though he did not know it, to becoming the future Primate of all Ireland. He told a friend that 'Kemble's sister seems to estimate things at their right value; she has apparently no sympathy with the shows and vanities wherein she is mixed.'

Francis I taken by a publisher, her career forging ahead, the added excitement of a coronation year. It was an exciting year for Fanny—she went the fashionable round, and danced whenever occasion permitted:

'I was enchanted with everything. Such shoals of partners! such nice people! such perfect music! such a delightful floor! Danced until the day had one eye open. The carriage had been ordered for two o'clock, but my father he would not *spoil sport*, so he angelically waited until past four. He is the best of fathers, the most benevolent of men. It is pleasanter to be chaperoned by one's father than one's mother. The latter, poor dear, never

flirts, gets sleepy and wants to go home before she comes; the former flirts with every pretty woman he meets and does not care till what hour in the morning. After all, I had to come away in the middle of a delightful mazurka.'

It was good that Fanny gained some pleasure that year. She was not to know it again for a long time, never in the same way. The clouds were gathering ever thicker round the Kembles.

(5)

Charles's difficulties were scattered, unconnected, dramatic, yet each threatened his position and hampered his fight to make Covent Garden a paying concern.

At the end of the previous year Richard Westmacott, editor of a newspaper called the *Age*, had published items which abused the Kemble family and Covent Garden, and made a particularly abusive attack on Fanny.

Westmacott is an interesting character. He had been a small actor, a hack journalist, and then adopted a career of blackmail, at whose practice he showed a natural ability. One of his first attempts at editing was a paper called the *Gazette of Fashion*. Another was an *Annual Critical Catalogue of the Royal Academy*, followed by another on *British Galleries of Painting and Sculpture*. Under a *nom de plume* he published in 1825 a novel entitled *Fitzalleyne of Berkeley; a Romance of the Present Times*, a thinly disguised account of scandals concerning the Berkeley family. In the same year he revived the *Age*, which had made a false start a few years before. The *Age* was one of the periodicals which made 'exposures' and accounts of scandals their chief appeal, attacking individuals right and left, and frequently without any real reason. On 17th October, 1830, the *Age* published a verse supposedly sung by Twiss and running:

'My feelings I cannot dissemble,
A shame to turn off such a man!
For I am the nephew of Kemble,
The father of "my daughter Fan".'

Little imagination is needed to understand the extent of Charles's indignation at this insult. Family honour meant much to every Kemble and with Charles the protection of the good name of every member of his family amounted to a sacred duty. For a few days he seethed under Westmacott's gibe at Fanny. And then came his opportunity to repay the insult. A few days after the verse was published Westmacott attended a performance of *The Duenna* at Covent Garden. During the performance Charles caught sight of Westmacott in his box. He went to the corridor behind the box, waited until the editor came out, and then knocked him senseless with a property club. Contemporary newspaper accounts of the incident indicate that the sympathy of the crowd of people at the theatre was so wholly on Charles's side that the police had to rescue Westmacott from a mob intent on lynching him. The *Age* printed an indignant account

of the incident, but other periodicals, including the *Times*, the *Post*, and the *Literary Gazette*, warmly defended Charles.

The affair came at a time when Charles had six lawsuits connected with the theatre to contend with, and the family was worried that Westmacott might provide a seventh. But the matter ended there, Westmacott preferring to lick his wounds in silence.

The Reform Bill, which was occasioning considerable public interest and worry to some, received its second reading in the House of Commons on the night of Fanny's benefit at Covent Garden. Even her staunchest supporters deserted her on that occasion. In those years political disputes brought people out into the streets to give vent to their feelings, rather than remain locked in their homes afraid of uttering a contrary opinion. The theatre that night was almost empty, while central London was thronged with large excited crowds who sang, bellowed, howled, broke windows, carried torchlights and set fire to effigies in the squares and street. Fanny felt unwell throughout the day, 'I had a knife of pain sticking in my side all through the play' and in later years she recalled that when the performance was over she collapsed from nervous exhaustion. 'I lay for an hour on my dressing-room floor, with only strength enough left to cry,' she recorded in her memoirs.

Throughout the whole of that year affairs at the theatre went continuously from bad to worse. No matter in what direction Charles looked—at the weekly receipts and expenditure, at the niggling disputes with his partners, at the status of the patent theatres themselves, at the absence of plays which awakened Fanny's interest, at the gradual desertion of the theatre in favour of newer pleasures—he faced continual worry, both immediate and for the future.

This was the time when Arnold, son of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, manager of the English Opera House, in the Strand, delivered the strongest attack yet made on the privileged theatres. Public opinion had awakened sufficiently to condemn the senseless mangling of Shakespeare's plays. The cause for their being mangled, the attempt to gain larger audiences by including attractions to entice audiences from the music-halls, melodramas, spectacles, proved more and more costly as time went on. Those who wanted spectacle and excitement deserted the privileged theatres in larger numbers for places like Astley's. True theatre-goers wanted their plays straight.

Other more recent innovations complicated the position even further.

There was a boom in the nineteenth-century forerunners of the night-clubs, clubs proper, and supper and dining clubs. Club life in the West End was rapidly gaining favour; the Union Club had been built in 1824, the University in 1826, the Oriental the following year, the Oxford and Cambridge in 1828, the Wyndham the same year, the Athenæum in 1830, and the Garrick in this year of 1831. They provided new forms of entertainment and recreation, further limiting attendance at the privileged theatres. Even the hour of night dining added its contribution to their plight, fixing the evening meal at a point half-way through the evening performance. Some short while later Dr. Wilson, in one of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* (he had been

made Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University in 1820, due to having strong Tory principles, and was one of the first to recognize the importance of Wordsworth's poetry), wrote: 'I meet young gentlemen now who formerly used to think it almost a crime not to go to the theatre, but now they ask "Whereabouts is Covent Garden Theatre?" although the same people would faint away if it were thought they had not been to the Italian Opera.' The trend which was to produce that comment had already commenced. In his *New History of the London Stage*, Fitzgerald adds that dancing had increased in public favour and further diminished the size of audiences. In 1831, there was the unusual spectacle of a coronation year with the theatre losing popularity as one of the chief features of the season.

Strictures levelled against the privileged theatre increased in number and severity. Charles, knowing that Fanny was the greatest female attraction on the London stage, may well have believed that Covent Garden would ultimately weather the storm. From his viewpoint there were reasons for such a belief. He regarded himself as being a cautious manager. The plays he presented were solid. His personal standing in the community was high; no word was ever uttered against him. He was a devoted father, a jealous guardian of his daughter's name and well-being; his action in thrashing Westmacott had proved that. Fanny was the belle of every ball she attended. She was admired for her intelligence, and her moral conduct was never in suspicion. The lustre given to the name of Kemble by John Philip and Sarah Siddons may have gone, but the name was still foremost in the theatre. He might well have considered his position built on more solid and lasting foundations than those who managed Drury Lane. True, Leigh Hunt, the critic, was sceptical of Fanny's abilities as an actress, but as she gained experience, grew to know her parts, her performances would become steadier and more consistent. Experience would enable her to accept her life as an actress. Charles had reason to believe that Covent Garden could weather a storm, which was, after all, only one of many both the theatre and the Kembles had encountered. There was another important reason: good money was made when Fanny appeared. True, it was lost on the nights when she was absent, but there were ways of countering such difficulties. When the season ended in June Charles was busy with plans for Fanny and himself to tour America.

The American tour had already been done by a number of actors. There had been Thomas Cooper, who landed at New York in 1798. George Frederick Cooke's first tours had made a mark in American theatrical history. Kean had made the tour in 1820, a short while before his *affaire* with the alderman's wife disgraced him in English eyes. Macready had been across in 1826. The Americans had received all of them kindly, in many cities there had been an enthusiastic welcome, and the Americans had money to spend on theatre-going which many thousands of Englishmen lacked. Charles may have reasoned that if America responded to Fanny, the first outstanding English actress to hazard the tour, as it had responded to others, sufficient money could be made to pay off outstanding debts at Covent Garden and ensure a fresh start.

Charles went into the project carefully, methodically, weighing the pros and

cons of the project. Directly he broached the subject he encountered difficulty; Fanny did not want to go. A tour of America was the last thing she wished. It was too far away, too frightening, too unfamiliar.

Meanwhile there was the summer tour of 1831 to prepare for, a tour which was to take them to Bristol, Bath, Exeter, Plymouth, Southampton, Manchester, and Birmingham.

Charles decided to wait until this summer tour was over.

The June of that year had not advanced far when another link with the past was snapped.

The entry in Fanny's diary for 8th June reads:

'While I was writing to Harriet my mother came in and told me that Mrs. Siddons is dead. I was not surprised. . . . She has been ill and gradually failing for so long. . . . I could not be much grieved for myself, for, of course, I had but little intercourse with her. . . . She died at eight o'clock this morning—peaceably and without suffering, and in full consciousness. . . . I wonder if she is gone where Milton and Shakespeare are, to whose worship she was priestess all her life—whose thoughts were her familiar thoughts, whose words were her familiar words. I wonder how much more she is allowed to know of all things now than she did while she was here. As I looked up into the bright sky to-day, while my father and mother were sadly recalling the splendour of her day of beauty and great public power, I thought of the unlimited glory she perhaps now beheld, of the great holiness and happiness I trust she now enjoys, and said in my heart "It must be well to be as she is." I had never thought be well to be as she *was*. . . .

'As soon as the news came my father went off to see what he could do for Cecilia, poor thing, and to bring her here, if she can be persuaded to leave Baker Street. He was not much shocked, though naturally deeply grieved by the event. My aunt had now been ill so long that any day might have brought the termination of the protracted process of her death. When he returned he said Cecilia was composed and quiet, but would not leave the house at present. I have written to Lady Francis (Leveson-Gower) to decline going down to Oatlands, which we were to have done this week. . . .'

So passed a great actress, one of the greatest to grace the English stage.

(6)

For the new summer tour Charles had decided to include plays in which Fanny had appeared in London during the season and those which she had appeared in during the first tour.

The early nineteenth-century theatre was not marked for its nights of gaiety and laughter. Dark brooding passions cast their shadows over the stuff of life. Death sat enthroned on the footlights, maniacal laughter jollied up flagging spirits; every masculine waist carried a bloodied dagger, every innocent young girl was destined for disgrace or insanity or both.

Among the new plays, new, that is, to Fanny, was *Venice Preserved*, a tragedy in blank verse, by Thomas Otway. In a short life, Otway gained close acquaintance with fatality. He had been educated at Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford, and from the day he left the cluster of grey dreaming spires his life was dogged by failure. He failed as an actor when Mrs. Aphra Behn helped him get on the stage. He failed to gain the love of the actress Elizabeth Barry, who first played Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, a bright-eyed charmer 'patronized' by the Earl of Rochester. He failed as a soldier amid the dykes of Holland. After this succession of failures his poetry was naturally very good. He died at the age of thirty-three, in 1685. *Venice Preserved* was first produced three years before his death. It is a play of comings, goings, conspiracies, and much stabbing. Why it should be set in Venice and present French names for most characters, only Otway knew. It tells how Belvidera, daughter of a Venetian senator, is secretly married to Jaffier, a youth who, in the traditional manner of young British poets, is involved in a plot against the State. With Pierre and Renault, leader of the plot, he goes about overthrowing senators and the stability of Venice, leaving Belvidera in the hands of Renault. To quote a synopsis: 'In the night Renault offers her insult.' The outraged Belvidera rushes back to her husband. Displaying more British morality than Venetian fire, she demands to know how Renault can be trusted as a political murderer if he behaves as a lecherous cad in private life?—a stage sentiment which gained popular approval from the time of Charles II to George IV. Faced with such clear-sighted logic, Jaffier exposes the plot to the Senate. This body has its own code and condemns all conspirators to death. Belvidera goes mad. On the scaffold Jaffier stabs his friend Pierre to death and then kills himself. The curtain descends on the wretched Belvidera expiring of a broken heart, though whether from her husband's quixotic desire to cheat the hangman or regret at blabbing about Renault's insults remains unclear.

Another of Fanny's new plays was *The Fair Penitent*. This was originally the work of Nicolas Rowe, a contemporary of Pope and Addison, and first saw light at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1703. It was based on *The Fatal Dowry* by Philip Massinger, a Salisburian, printed in 1632. Massinger was the author of one of John Philip Kemble's favourite plays, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1633). This early fatality comprised a whole series of tragedies, a ladder of misery with stabbing on every other rung. At the opening the Duke of Burgundy has just died in jail where he had been imprisoned for debt. His son, Charalois, offers to serve out his father's sentence if the creditors release the body for decent burial. When the offer is accepted Charalois goes to jail; in one of those friendships which frequently pop up in plays and nowhere in life, his friend Romond moves into jail with him. A former president of the Burgundian parliament, Rochford, impressed by Charalois's piety, secures their release, and presumably to lessen his misery, gives Charalois his daughter Beaumelle as wife. Beaumelle is found kissing her former suitor Novell. Charalois stabs Novell to death and drags Beaumelle before her father, who condemns her faithless kissing of her lover. Charalois then stabs Beaumelle to death, a deed which angers Rochford, who has him clapped back into jail. Charalois is then stabbed by a friend of Novell, who, in his turn, is stabbed to death by Romont.

It is scarcely surprising that audiences made sure they were well fed when they went to the theatre.

Of all Fanny's plays to date, only one was new. This was *Fazio*, by Henry Hart Milman, professor of poetry at Oxford and later Dean of St. Paul's. Milman had only just published his *History of the Jews* when *Fazio*, a series of fatalities in the traditional manner, reached the stage. The play might well have been written in the early seventeenth century. Fazio is an alchemist. Bartolo, an old miser, dies at Fazio's house. Fazio takes the dead man's bag of gold and announces that he has discovered the philosopher's stone. With his new-gained riches he turns to the gay life, in particular to the dashing and voluptuous Marchesa Aldabella. Fazio's wife, Bianca, piqued at her husband's wayward fancies, runs to tell the authorities that Bartolo was murdered. Fazio is hanged; Bianca dies of a broken heart.

With these pieces in mind, it is not difficult to sympathize with Fanny's continued dislike of the theatre. Her quick intelligence recognized them for what they were: flamboyant, weighty, incredibly stupid pieces, lacking rhyme as well as reason, and appealing only to mediocre mentalities. Small wonder that she wrote in her diary:

> 'It is so very pleasant to return to Shakespeare after reciting Bianca and Isabella, etc. I revelled in the glorious poetry and the bright, throbbing *reality* of the Italian girl's existence. . . .'

With the necessity of having to play such pieces most nights it is surprising she, too, did not succumb to a surfeit of gloom. It is even more surprising that she managed to remain normal, able to appreciate the world around her, and see it with a fresh, undimmed eye.

Before the summer tour began she had noted that the first day of May was 'as sulky a day as ever *glouted* in an English sky. The "young morn" came 'picking her way from the east, leading with her a dripping, draggled May, instead of Milton's glorious vision,' and later in the same week there was 'real March weather: cold, piercing, damp, wretched, in spite of which I carried Shakespeare to walk with me in the square, and read all over again for the fiftieth time the conjectures of everybody about him and his life. How little we know *him!* I had the square to myself. It was delicious: lilac, syringa, hawthorn, lime blossoms, and new-mown grass in the midst of London—and Shakespeare to think about. How grateful I felt for so much enjoyment!'

A few weeks later Charles and Fanny, with Dall in tow, left London to keep the good folk of the provinces acquainted with latest evidences of dramatic art. The journey was done by coach. For a few days or weeks, they performed at one town or other, and then the coach would be waiting, the horses stamping their feet, passengers scrambled into their seats, the horn sounded, and the coach rumbled off down the long road.

That year the tour began at Bristol. The first play was a mangled version of *Romeo and Juliet*. Fanny noted that the local actress who played the Nurse was a perfect farce in herself and made her laugh in the middle of her trance scene.

'Indeed, the whole play was probably considered an "improved version" of Shakespeare's Veronese story, both in the force and delicacy of the text. Sundry wicked words and coarse appellations were decorously dispensed with; many fine passages received judicious additions; not a few were equally judiciously omitted altogether. What a shocking hash!'

The following morning provided a more pleasant experience.

'After breakfast we sallied forth to the market, to my infinite delight and amusement. It is most beautifully clean. The fruit and vegetables look so pretty and give such an idea of plentiful abundance, that it is delightful to walk about among them. Even the meat, which I am generally averse to go near, was so beautifully and nicely arranged that it had none of its usual repulsiveness. The sight of the whole place, and the quaint looking rustic people, was so pleasantly curious. We stopped to gossip with a bewitching old country dame, whose market stock might have sat, with her in the middle of it, for its picture: the veal and poultry so white and delicate looking, the bacon like striped pink-and-white ribbons, the butter so golden, fresh, and sweet, in a great basket trimmed round with bunches of white jasmine, the green leaves and starry blossoms and exquisite perfume making one believe that butter ought always to be served, not in a "lordly dish" but in a bower of jasmine. The good lady told us she had just come up from "the farm" and that the next time she came she would bring us some home-made bread, and that she was going back to brew and to bake. . . . Went to the theatre and rehearsed *Venice Preserved*, which is an entirely different kind of thing. . . .'

The trip to America was already well implanted in her thoughts. Following a trip to the Abbey Church in Bristol, she noted:

'In America there are no grey abbeys, no ruined cloisters, to tell of monastic brotherhoods . . . no great, old, time-stained, weather-beaten, ivy-mantled churches full of tombs, such as we saw to-day, with curious carvings and quaint effigies, and where the early rulers of the land embraced the faith and received the baptism of Christ. That must be a very strange country. But they have Plymouth Rock. . . .'

She describes a ride on horse-back into the country, taken with Charles, the fact of whose companionship was 'a circumstance of enjoyment to me always':

'The characteristic feature of the scenery in this region is the vivid, deep-toned foliage of the hanging woods, through whose dense tufts of green, masses of grey rock and long *scars* of warm-coloured red-brown earth appear every now and then with the most striking effect. The deep-sunk river wound itself drowsily to a silver thread at the base of steep cliffs, to the summit of which we climbed, reaching a fine level land of open downs carpeted with close, elastic turf. On we rode, up hill and down dale, through shady lanes full of the smell of lime-blossom, skirting meadows fragrant with the ripe

mellow hay and honey-suckle clover, and then between plantations of aromatic, spicy fir and pine, all exhaling their perfumes under the influence of the warm sunset . . . two grey towers well defined against the sky looked over the whole domain, which spread on our left in sloping lawns, where single oaks and elms of noble size threw their shadows on the sunlit sward that looked as if none but fairies' feet had ever pressed upon it. Beyond this, through breaks and frames, and arches made by the trees, the broad Severn glittered in the evening light. . . .'

On 15th July she wrote:

'Miserrima! I have broken a looking-glass! and on a Friday, too! What do I think will happen to me! Had a long talk with dear Dall about my dislike to the stage. I do not think it is the acting itself that is so disagreeable to me, but the public personal exhibition, the violence done (as it seems to me) to womanly dignity and decorum in thus becoming the gaze of every eye and theme of every tongue. If my audience was reduced to my intimates and associates I should not mind it so much, I think: but I am not quite sure that I should like it then.'

At the end of a performance of *Venice Preserved*—with Fanny playing Belvidera and Charles as Jaffier—'I called to him in tones of the most piercing anguish (an agony not entirely feigned, as my bruises can bear witness). The curtain descended slowly amidst sympathetic sobs and silence—the musicians themselves, deeply moved, no doubt, with the sorrows of the scene, mournfully resumed their fiddles, and struck up "ti *ti* tum *tiddle* un *ti* tum *ti*"—the jolliest jig you ever heard. The bathos was irresistible; we behind the scenes, the principal sufferers (perhaps) in the night's performance, were instantly comforted, and all but shouted with laughter.'

The same week she had a 'long and edifying talk with dear Dall upon my prospects of marrying. "While you remain single," says she, "and choose to work, your fortune is an independent and ample one; as soon as you marry there's no such thing. Your position in society," says she, "is both a pleasanter and more distinguished one than your birth or real station entitles you to, but that also is the result of your professional exertions, and might, and probably would, alter for the worse if you left the stage, for, after all, it is mere frivolous fashionable popularity." I ought to have got up and made her a curtsy for that. So that it seems I have fortune and fame (such as it is) —positive real advantages, which I cannot give with myself, and which I cease to own when I give myself away, which certainly makes my marrying anyone or anyone marrying me rather a solemn consideration; for I lose everything and my marryee gains nothing in a worldly point of view—says she—and it's incontrovertible and not pleasant. So I took up Dante and read about devils boiled in pitch, which refreshed my imagination and cheered my spirits very much.'

The next day they were on the road again:

'. . . We started at eight, and taking the whole coach to ourselves as we do, I think travelling by a public conveyance the best mode of getting over the road. They run so rapidly; there is so little time lost, and so much trouble with one's luggage saved. The morning was grey and soft and promised a fine day, but broke its promise at the end of our second stage, and began to pelt with rain, which it continued to do the livelong blessed day. . . .'

The next stop was at Exeter. Here they went for another ride. Fanny wrote:

'We rode for about an hour between powdery hedges all smothered in dust, up the steepest of hills, and under the hottest of suns, but we had our reward when we halted at the top and looked down upon a magnificent panorama of land and water, hill and dale, broad smiling meadows, and dark shadowy woodland—a vast expanse of various beauty, over which the eye wandered and paused in slow contentment. As we came leisurely down the opposite side, we met a gipsy woman, and I reined up my horse and listened to my fortune. "I have a friend abroad who is very fond of me." I hope so. "I have a relation abroad who is very fond of me, too." I know so. "I shall live long." More is the pity. "I shall marry and have three children." Quite enough. "I shall take easily to love, but it will not break my heart." I am glad to hear that. "I shall cross the sea before I see London again." Ah! I am afraid not. "The end of my summer will be happier than its beginning"—and that may easily be. For that I gave my prophetess a shilling. Oh, Zingarella! my blessing on your black eyes and red-brown cheeks! May you have spoken true!'

The road again, this time to Plymouth where on the first night 'the house was very full; the play *Romeo and Juliet*. I played abominably ill, and did not like my audience, who must have been very good natured if they liked me.'

Here, as at Brighton, she delighted in walking down to the sea, where she encountered boating parties:

'I stood and watched a party on pleasure put off from the shore, consisting of a basket of fuel, two baskets of provisions, a cross-looking, thin, withered, bony woman, wrapped in a large shawl, and with boots thick enough to have kept her dry if she had walked through the sea from Plymouth to Mount Edgecombe. Her *tête-à-tête* companion was a short, thick, squat, stumpy, dumpy, dumpling of a man in a round jacket and very tight striped trousers. . . . The sour she stepped into their small boat first, but as soon as her fat playfellow seated himself by her, the poor little cockle-shell dipped so with the increased weight that the tail of the cross-shawl hung deep in the water.'

A mild demonstration of approval occurred at the theatre the following night,

after Mlle. Dumesnil ended her scene (the play was *The Gamester*) by spitting in her handkerchief and throwing it in the face of her opposite number. The next day, with Charles suffering from a bilious attack, they themselves went out in a boat:

> 'The day was dull, the sky and sea lead-coloured. By degrees the brown coast lost its distinctness and became covered with a dark haze that seemed to blend everything into a still, stony, threateningly iron-grey mass. The wind rose, the sea became inky black and swelled into heavy ridges, which made our little vessel dip deep and spring high, as she toiled forward and then down came the rain—such tremendous rain! Cloaks, shawls, and umbrellas were speedily produced but we were two miles from shore, between the rising sea and the falling clouds, sick, wet, squeezed. Oh, the delights of that party of pleasure! My father looked cadaverous, Dall was portentously silent, I shut my eyes and tried to sleep, being in that state when to see, or hear, or speak, or be spoken to, is equally fatal.'

On again along the road eastward to Exeter, Dorchester, and then to Weymouth, to find 'a lovely summer sea, with a dozen varying zones of colour streaking its rippling surface' and a climb up the long sheer slope of Portland with Charles:

> 'The sun's rays fell perpendicularly on our heads, the short close grass which clothed the burning, stony soil was as slippery as glass with the heat, and I have seldom had a harder piece of exertion. . . . We saw below us a railroad cut in the rock to convey the huge masses of stone from the famous quarries down to the shore. The descent looked almost vertical, and we watched two immense loads go slowly down by means of a huge cylinder and chains, which looked as if the world might hang upon them in safety. I lay down on the summit of the rock while my father went off exploring further, and the perfect stillness of the solitude was like a spell. There was not a sound of life but the low, drowsy humming of the bees in the stone-rooted tufts of fragrant thyme. On our return we had to run down the steep slippery slopes, striking our feet hard to the earth to avoid falling. . . .'

On again, this time to Portsmouth and thence to Southampton, where Fanny played Juliet:

> ' . . . I was always arrayed in long white muslin draperies and veils, with my head bound up, corpse fashion, and lying, as my aunt stretched me, on the black bier in the vault, with all my white folds drawn like carved stone robes along my figure and round my feet, with my hands folded and my eyes shut. I have had some bad nervous moments, sometimes fancying, "Suppose I should really die while I am lying here, making believe to be dead;" and imagining the surprise and dismay of my Romeo when I didn't get up; and at others fighting hard against heavy drowsiness of over-fatigue, lest I should be fast asleep, if not dead, when it came to my turn to speak. . . .'

From Southampton, shortly before they returned to London, Fanny wrote to Harriet. In her letter she gave her opinion of the difference between fashionable names and names which had become known for other reasons:

'Genius and pre-eminent power of intellect belong to any class, and one would naturally prefer the society of any individual who possessed these to that of the King of England (who, by-the-by, is not, I believe, particularly brilliant). I would rather pass a day with Stephenson than with Lord Alvanley, though the one is a coal-digger by birth, who occasionally murders the King's English, and the other is the keenest wit and one of the finest gentlemen about town. But Stephenson's attributes of genius, industry, mental power and perseverance are his individually, while Lord Alvanley's gifts and graces (his wit, indeed, excepted) are, in good measure, those of his whole social set. Moreover, in the common superficial intercourse of society, the minds and morals of those you meet are not really what you come in contact with half the time, while from their manners there is, of course, no escape. Those persons may be well preferred as temporary associates whose manners are most refined, easy, and unconstrained, as I think of so-called "fine people" are. Originality and power of intellect belong to no class, but with information, cultivation, and the mental advantages derived from education, "fine people" are perhaps rather better endowed as a class than others. Their lavish means for obtaining instruction, and their facilities for travelling, if they are but moderately endowed by nature and moderately inclined to profit by them, certainly enable them to see, hear, and know more of the surface of things than others. This, no doubt, a merely superficial superiority. I suppose that there are not many people, and certainly no class of people, high, low, or of any degree, who go much below surfaces. . . .'

The understanding, this perception, shown by this girl in her twenties is frequently quite unique. She was not only born out of her family's profession, unable to stomach easily the failings and stupidities then commonplaces; she was born out of her age.

The tour over, Fanny returned to London determined to spare herself no effort to make sufficient money to prove to her father that a tour of America was unnecessary. She undertook a number of other roles for which she was completely unsuited, being too young, too short, too inexperienced, and too intelligent. Bad omens for any actress. But the new season had scarcely opened when an event occurred that defeated her and left the Kembles no choice. Charles was taken seriously ill.

The Covent Garden jinx was at work again.

(7)

Fanny's first comment on her father's illness comes in her diary for Saturday, 25th November, some little while after he had first taken to his bed:

'My father was not quite so well this morning. I took Dr. Wilson home in the carriage. He talked a great deal about this horrible burking business, a series of atrocious murders committed by two wretches of the names of Burke and Bishop, for the purpose of obtaining, for the corpses of their victims, the price paid by the Edinburgh surgeons for subjects of dissection. . . .'

November 29: 'I went to my father's room and sat by him for a long time and talked about the horse I had bought for him. There he lies in his bed. God knows when he will ever be able to walk again.'

November 30: 'I went to rehearsal. It seems that the managers and proprietors (of course not my poor father) had summoned a meeting of all the actors to try to induce them to accept for the present a reduced rate of salary till the theatre can be in some measure relieved of its most pressing difficulties. I knew nothing of this, and, finding them all very solemnly assembled in the green room, asked them cheerfully why they were all there, which must have struck them strangely. I dare say they do not know how little I know, about this disastrous concern. On my return home, I heard that Dr. Watson had seen my father, and requested that Dr. Wilson might be sent for. They fear inflammation on the lungs; he has gone to the very limit of his tether. . . .'

December 1: ' . . . It seems that in the arrangement, whatever it may be, which has taken place between the actors and the management, Mr. Harley and Mr. Egerton are the only ones who have declined the proposed accommodation. Young has behaved like an angel, offering to play for nothing till Christmas; how kind and liberal he is! Mr. Abbott, Mr. Duruset, Mr. Ward, and all the others, have been as considerate and generous as possible. But the thing [Covent Garden] is doomed, and will go to the ground, in spite of every effort that can be made to stave the ruin off. . . .'

December 4: 'My father, for the first time this fortnight, was able to dine with us. . . .'

December 5: 'My father is worse again to-day. *Ohime!* His state is most precarious and this relapse very alarming. It is dreadful to see him drag himself about and hear his feeble voice. Oh, my dear, dear father! Heaven preserve you to us!'

Tuesday, December 6: 'My father is much worse . . . he has just been bled and that has somewhat relieved him. I went and sat by him while my mother drove out in the carriage. . . .'

December 8: 'My dear father is beginning to gain strength once more, thank Heaven. . . .'

December 17: 'My father, thank God, appears much better.'

In a letter to Harriet she wrote:

'The theatre is going on very ill, but negotiations are pending between the partners, which it is hoped may eventually terminate in some arrangement with the creditors about the property. I have been acting Bianca again. I certainly am not jealous, and cannot imagine being so, any more of my husband than of my friend. I doubt if I have the power of loving which

produces jealousy, in spite of which that part tries me dreadfully. I can conceive no torment comparable to that passion which, however, I think is foreign to my own nature. . . . Do you hear that poor Lord Grey is said to be haunted by a vision of Lord Castlereagh's head? It sounds like a temptation of the devil to scare him into cutting his throat. Lord Brougham and the Duke of Wellington seem to me the only two men likely to keep their heads in these times of infinite political perturbation, but the one is made of steel and the other of india-rubber.' (18th December, 1831.)

A few days later:

'My father . . . is released from his bed, of which he must be heartily sick, and came down to breakfast at the usual time. He is still weak and low, and wretchedly thin, but we trust a little time will bring back good spirits and good looks, though after such a terrible attack I fear it will be long before his constitution recovers its former strength, if it ever does. He talks of resuming his labours at the theatre next Monday week. Oh, my dear Harriet, what a dreadful season of anxiety this has been, but, thank God, it is past. . . .

'I think it would be a wise thing if I were to go to America and work till I have made £10,000, and then return to England and go the round of the provinces, and act for a few nights' leave-taking in London. Prudence would then, perhaps, find less difficulty in adjusting my plans for the future. This is what I think would be well for me to do, supposing all things remain as they are and God preserves my health and strength.' (29th December, 1831.)

As on the previous occasion when against her own wish she had become an actress, she had now made the decision to undertake the American tour to help her father.

In the same letter she asks Harriet:

'Have you seen in the papers that poor Torrijos and his little band, consisting of sixty men, several of whom John knew well, have been lured into the interior of Spain and there taken prisoners and shot? This news has shocked us all, especially poor John.'

Her New Year thought was:

'All the hours of last year are gone, standing at the bar of Heaven, our witnesses or accusers: the evil alone, the good left undone, the opportunities vouchsafed neglected, the warnings given and unheeded, the talents lent and unworthily or not employed, they are gone from us all for ever! for ever! and we make merry over the flight of Time! O Time, our dearest friend! how is it that we part so carelessly from you, who never can return to us?'

Her diary for 9th January, 1832, notes:

'Rehearsed *Romeo and Juliet* with all my heart. Oh, light, life, truth,

and lovely poetry! I sat on the cold stage, that I might hear them even mumble over their parts as they do. My father seemed to me very weak, and not by any means fit for his work to-night.'

A note on January 14: 'I rode at two with my father. Passed Tyrone Power; what a clever, pleasant man he is!' Three years after this note was made Tyrone Power was to earn the highest sum of money ever paid to a comedian at the Haymarket Theatre, £150 a week. Talfourd recorded that Power 'buzzes about the verge of vulgarity and skims the surface of impudence with a light wing and a decent consideration for fastidious nerves.' Later he too went to America, and remained there.

(8)

Charles's return to the theatre was marked with a rapid worsening of affairs at the theatre. Arnold's attack the previous year had demanded that the right to act legitimate drama be granted to all British subjects who wished to, and could, open theatres and perform plays. A lawsuit—on top of the others between Charles and his partners at Covent Garden—resulted from this and a committee of inquiry was set up by Parliament to investigate the matter. The matter had been adjourned *sine die*, Fanny had told Harriet in the early summer. To try to regain money, Charles decided to spend more; he set about staging a number of lavishly upholstered pageants. One of them was a piece on *Bonaparte*. Not a small affair but (to quote Fanny) a piece got up by 'that prosperous establishment, Covent Garden Theatre. Think,' she added, 'of Bonaparte being acted! It makes one grin and shudder.' The piece gained some favour and 'interested' the audience. Then came *Henry VIII*, in which Fanny, as Katherine of Cleves, became so tired under the weight of her costume that she could scarcely stand. *Henry VIII* played to almost empty houses. She managed to keep going, spurred on by a desire to help Charles, and by returning from the theatre every night to work on a play which had already occupied her mind for over a year, *Star of Seville*.

On 14th January, 1832, she finished it. Soon after this 'great pleasure' was over, Charles decided to present her own play, *Francis I*, at Covent Garden.

For a while Fanny believed that this would help and might make their American tour needless. But gradually her hope waned. Towards the end of the following month she wrote to Harriet:

'I am greatly worried and annoyed about my play. The more I see and hear of it the stronger my perception grows of its defects, which, I think, are rendered even more glaring by the curtailments and alterations necessary for its representation. The whole thing distresses me as much as such a thing can. . . .

'That luckless concern, in which you are a luckless shareholder (Covent Garden), is going to the dogs faster and faster every day. In spite of the Garrick Club, and all its noble regenerators of the drama, I think the end of it, and that no distant one, will be utter ruin.' (24th February, 1832.)

The following day her diary noted the final phase of the battle: 'I came down into the drawing-room with a headache, a sideache, a heartache, and swollen red eyes. My mother greeted me with the news that the theatre was finally ruined, that at Easter it must close, that we must all go different ways, and I probably to America. I was sobered from my imaginary sorrow directly. . . . I could not answer my mother, but went to the window and looked up and down the streets that were getting empty and dark and silent, and my heart sank as I thought of leaving my home, my England. . . .'

A few days later she rode in Hyde Park with her brother Henry. They discussed the state of affairs at the theatre. In her diary that night she wrote:

'. . . dismal enough it is to stand under the crumbling fabric we have spent having and living, body, substance, and all but soul, to prop, and see that it must inevitably fall and crush us presently. Yet from my earliest childhood I remember this has been hanging over us. I have heard it foretold, I have known it expected, and there is no reason why it should now take any of us by surprise, or strike us with sudden dismay. Thank God our means of existence lie within ourselves. While health and strength are vouchsafed to us there is no need to despond. It is very hard and sad to be come so far on in life, or rather into age, as my father is, without any hope of support for himself and my mother but toil, and that of the severest kind. But God is Merciful. He has hitherto cared for us, as He cares for all His creatures, and He will not forsake us if we do not forsake Him or ourselves. . . . My father and I need scarcely remain without engagements, either in London or the provinces. . . . If our salaries are smaller, so must our expenses be. . . .

'It is pitiful to see how my father still clings to that theatre. Is it because the art he loves once had its noblest dwelling there? Is it because his own name and the names of his brother and sister are graven, as it were, on its very stones? Does he think he could not act in a smaller theatre? What can, in spite of his interest, make him so loath to leave that ponderous ruin? Even to-day, after summing up all the sorrow and care and toil, and waste of life and fortune which that concern has cost his brother, himself, and all of us, he exclaimed, "Oh, if I had but £10,000, I could set it all right again, even now!" My mother and I actually stared at this infatuation. If I had twenty, or a hundred thousand pounds, not one farthing would I give to the redeeming of that fatal millstone, which cannot be raised, but will infallibly drag everything tied to it down to the level of its own destruction. The past is past, and for the future we must think and act as speedily as we may. If our salaries are half what they are now we need not starve. As long as God keeps us in health of body and mind, nothing need signify, provided we are not obliged to separate and go off to that dreadful America. . . .'

A few days later she noted that her brother Henry had obtained his commission in the army—a commission which she purchased out of the money she received from Murray for her play.

The following day she noted that her father was 'bowed down with care.'

It was decided that Charles should not play in the forthcoming production of Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback*, a play about which Fanny had already noted 'What would I not give to have written that play!' After discussing the matter, on 10th March, with Mr. Bartley, one of his associates, Charles seemed stunned.

'He seemed too bewildered to give any answer, or even heed, to anything, and Mr. Bartley went away. My father continued to walk up and down the room for nearly half an hour, without uttering a syllable, and at last flung himself into a chair, and leaned his head and arms on the table. I was horribly frightened, and turned as cold as stone, and for some minutes could not muster up courage enough to speak to him.

'At last I got up and went to him. On my touching his arm, he started up and exclaimed, "Good God! what will become of us all?"

'I tried to comfort him, and spoke for a long time, but much, I fear, as a blind man speaks of colours. I do not know, and I do not believe anyone knows, the real state of terrible involvement in which this miserable concern is wrapped. What I dread most of all is that my father's health will break down. To-day, while he was talking to me, I saw him suddenly put his hand to his side in a way that sent a pang through my heart. He seems utterly prostrated in spirit, and I fear will brood himself ill. God help us all!'

On June 18: 'At supper my father read us his examination before the committee of the House of Commons about this minor theatre business. Of course, though every word he said upon the subject is gospel truth, it will only pass for the partial testimony of a person deeply interested in his own monopoly.'

This was the occasion when Charles had given evidence before the committee appointed by the House to inquire into the status of the privileged theatres. The matter was to drag on for thirteen years before any final decision was reached. Before it was gained others would have expended health, energy, and fortune upon attempting to turn Covent Garden into a paying concern. No one knew this in 1832, when the Kembles had their own failures thick and fast upon them, and saw their own connections with the theatre severing one after another until even that of walking in through the stage door to prepare for the evening's performance was to go.

(9)

On 22nd June Fanny acted at Covent Garden for the last time. The play was Knowles's *Hunchback*. The decision had been made; preparations were complete. Within a few days Charles and she were to go on a last short tour of the provinces before leaving for America, the theatre was starting under new management though Charles retained his one-sixth interest; the fight was over. In Fanny's diary is a description of her last night at Covent Garden:

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

The Public is respectfully informed that THIS THEATRE

WILL BE OPENED

This present MONDAY, October 5, 1829

When will be performed, Shakspeare's Tragedy of

ROMEO and JULIET.

Prince Escalus, Mr. HORREBOW, Paris, Mr. DURUSET,
Montague, Mr. TURNOUR, Capulet, Mr. EGERTON,
Romeo, Mr. ABBOTT,
(his first appearance at this Theatre these five years)
Mercutio, Mr. C. KEMBLE,
(his first appearance in that character)
Benvolio, Mr. BAKER, Tybalt, Mr. DIDDEAR, Friar John Mr. MEARS,
Friar Lawrence. Mr. WARDE,
(his first appearance in that character)
Apothecary, Mr. MEADOWS, Page Miss Fortescue, Balthazar, Mr. Irwin
Abram Mr Heath, Samson Mr Atkins, Gregory Mr Norris, Peter, Mr KEELEY
Juliet by Miss FANNY KEMBLE,
(Being her first appearance on any stage.)
Lady Capulet, *(on this occasion)* Mrs. C. KEMBLE,
Nurse, Mrs. DAVENPORT.

In act I. a Masquerade and Dance

Incidental to the Piece.

In act V. The Funeral Procession of Juliet, and a Solemn Dirge.

The Vocal Parts by Mess. Beale, Birt, Caulfield, Crumpton, Fuller, Goodson, Miller, May, Mears, Norris, Purday, Ransford, Shegog, G. Stansbury, C & S. Tett, Wood, &c. &c.

Mesdames Appleton, Brown, Cawse, H. Cawse, Clarke, Daly, Fenwick, Forde, Fortescue, Goodwin, Keeley, Hughes, Hudson, Nicholson, Perry, Phillips, J. Scott, Weston, &c. &c.

To which will be added, the Melo-Drama of

The Miller & His Men.

Grindoff. *(the Miller)* Mr. FARLEY,
Count Friberg, Mr. HORREBOW, Karl (his servant) Mr. BLANCHARD, Lothair, Mr. DURUSET,
Kelmar (an old Cottager) Mr. EVANS, Ribet and Golotz (two Bandits) Mess. HENRY and MEARS,
Zingra, Mr. NORRIS, Lindorf, Mr. S. TETT, Coburg, Mr. FULLER,
Claudine, Mrs. VINING, Ravina, Miss LACY,

A NEW STAIRCASE *leading to the Dress Circle only*, has been constructed at the Bow-street Entrance, which will be exclusively appropriated to the accommodation of those parties who may purchase Tickets at the Box-office at the time of taking Places.

PLACES for the BOXES to be had at the Box-Office, Hart-street, from Ten till Four; where Private Boxes can also be had.

**** For the better preservation of decorum and security of the Public, the arrangements before the Curtain will be put under the direction of the new Metropolitan Police.

The DOORS to be opened at Half-past Six o'clock, and the Play to begin exactly at Seven.

Boxes 7s. Second Price 3s. 6d.—Pit 3s.6d. Second Price 2s.—Gallery 2s. Second Price 1s.—Upper Gallery 1s.

☞ *The peculiar legal liabilities to which Mr. C. Kemble is subject, prevent any alteration in the Prices of Admission.*

Miss KELLY
has consented to perform gratuitously for *Ten Nights*, & will make her first appearance on *Tuesday* next.
Miss FOOTE
has also given her services for *Ten Nights*, and will appear as soon as her provincial engagements will permit.
Mr. T. P. COOKE
has offered to act for *Six Nights* gratuitously, and due notice will be given of his first appearance.
Mr. KEAN
will act *Three Nights* gratuitously, immediately on his return to London.
Mons. DROUET
has also volunteered to perform on the FLUTE for *Three Nights*—his first appearance will be on Wednesday next.

Tomorrow, will be revived the Comedy of **THE PROVOKED HUSBAND.**
Lord Townley, Mr. C. KEMBLE. Sir Francis Wronghead, Mr. FAWCETT,
Mr. Manly, Mr. ABBOTT, Squire Richard, Mr. MEADOWS, John Moody, Mr. BLANCHARD,
Lady Townley, Miss ELLEN TREE, *(her first appearance on this stage)*
Lady Grace, Miss LAWRENCE, *(from the Theatre Royal, Manchester,—her first appearance on this stage.)*
Lady Wronghead, Mrs. DAVENPORT, Miss Jenny, Miss NELSON *(her first appearance in that character)*
After which will be produced *(for the first time at this Theatre)* the celebrated Melo-Drama of

THERESE; or, The ORPHAN of GENEVA.

Fontaine, Mr. ABBOTT, Carwin, Mr. WARDE, Lavigne, Mr. MEADOWS,
Count, Mr. DURUSET, Delparc, Mr. EGERTON, Picard, Mr. EVANS,
Therese, Miss KELLY,
Countess, Miss LACY, Bridget, Mrs. GIBBS.

On Wednesday, the Comedy of **THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.**
Lord Ogleby, Mr. JONES,
(From the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh,—his first appearance at this Theatre.)
Sir John Melvil, Mr. ABBOTT, Sterling, Mr. FAWCETT, Lovewell, Mr. WARDE, Canton Mr. FARLEY
Brush, Mr. POWER, Mrs. Heidelberg, Mrs. DAVENPORT, Miss Sterling, Mrs. GIBBS,
Fanny, Miss ELLEN TREE, Betty, Mrs. J. HUGHES.

End of the Comedy, Mons. DROUET will perform Weber's favourite Air, "*The Huntsman's Chorus*," with variations for the **FLUTE**, arranged by himself.

To which will be added the last new popular Melo-Drama called **THE DEVIL'S ELIXIR.**

A NEW COMEDY

in two acts, is in rehearsal, and will be produced on *Saturday*, Oct. 10.

The characters by Mr. C. KEMBLE, Mr. WARDE, Mr. BLANCHARD, Mr. KEELEY,
Miss ELLEN TREE, Mrs. GIBBS, Miss FORDE.

Printed by W. Reynolds, 9, Denmark-Court, Strand.

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ROMEO, THE MILLER, THE KEMBLES, and FANNY

Playbill of Fanny's "First" First Night



FANNY — A sketch made on her first night . . . 5th October, 1829

'In the evening to the theatre. I only played pretty well, except the last scene, which was better than the rest. At the end of the play Mr. Bartley made the audience a speech, mentioning our departure, and bespeaking their good will for the new management. The audience called for Knowles, and then clamoured for us till we were obliged to go out. They rose to receive us, and waved their hats and handkerchiefs, and shouted farewell to us. It made my heart ache to leave my kind, good, indulgent audience, my friends, as I feel them to be, my countrymen, my English folk; my "very worthy and approved good masters"; and as I thought of the strangers for whom I am now to work in that distant, strange country to which we are going, the tears rushed into my eyes, and I hardly knew what I was doing. I scarcely think I even made the conventional courtesy of leave-taking to them, but snatched the little nosegay of flowers from my sash, and threw it into the pit with handfuls of kisses, as a farewell token of my affection and gratitude. And so my father, who was very much affected, led me off, while the house rang with the cheering of the audience. When we came off my courage gave way utterly, and I cried most bitterly. As my father was taking me to my dressing-room, Laporte ran after us, to be introduced to me, to whom I wished success very dolorously from the midst of my tears. He said he ought to cry at our going away more than anyone; and perhaps he is right, but we should be better worth his while when we come back, if ever that day comes. I saw numbers of people whom I knew standing behind the scenes to take leave of us. . . .

'I took an affectionate farewell of poor dear old Rye (the property man), and Louis, his boy, gave me two beautiful nosegays. It was all wretched, and yet it was a pleasure to feel that those who surrounded and were dependent on us cared for us. I know all the servants and workpeople of the theatre were fond of me. It was sad to say good-bye to all these kind, civil, cordial, humble friends; from my good, pretty little maid, who stood sobbing by my dressing-room door, to the grim wrinkled visage of honest old Rye. . . .'

A few days later Charles and Fanny left London for Scotland.
Passing Berwick and Dunbar, on the 29th, Fanny noted:

'Poor Walter Scott! he will never sail by this lovely coast again, every bold headland and silver creek of which lives in his song or story. He has given of his own immortality to the earth which must ere long receive the whole of his mortality.'

The next day they started rehearsals. On 1st July, in a letter to Harriet she gave this picture of their leaving London:

'We left (on) Wednesday at eight o'clock. The parting between my mother and Dall, and myself and my dear little sister (Adelaide), was most bitter. . . . John came down to Greenwich with us, but would not come on board the steamboat. He stood on the shore and I at the ship's side, looking at what I knew was him, though my eyes could distinguish none of his features

from the distance. My poor mother stood crying by my side, and bade me send him away. I gave him one signal, which he returned, and then ran up the beach and was gone!—gone for two years, perhaps more, perhaps gone from me for ever in this world. . . . My father is pretty well, in spite of all the late anxieties and annoyances he has had to wade through. In the course of the day preceding our departure from London two arrests were served upon him by creditors of the theatre, who, I suppose, think when he is gone the whole concern must collapse and fall to pieces, and I began to think some means would be devised to prevent our leaving England after all.'

The following week Charles and Fanny bade farewell to Maria:

'At eleven we were obliged to go to rehearsal, and when we returned found my mother busy with her packing. . . . When she was gone, I sat down beside my father with a book in my hand, not reading, but listening to his stifled sobbing; and every now and then, in spite of my determination not to do it, looking up to see how far the ship had moved (the ship taking Maria back to London). . . .'

They acted in Edinburgh for a few weeks and then went on to Liverpool, where, on 1st August, with Dall, in the *Pacific*, they slipped down the tide and cut into the green waters of the Irish Channel, on the voyage across the Atlantic to America.

Covent Garden had gone from the control of the Kemble family. Thirty years had passed since John Philip had borrowed money to purchase his share and manage the theatre. Six years had passed since Charles had taken over John's share. The Kemble name would never fade in the annals of British theatrical history, but there was no longer a Kemble struggling to keep the family name nailed to the mainmast of what, despite all its shortcomings and failings, represented what was best in English drama. After the years of endeavour the only thing left them was the share in the property.

Fanny's sole reason for going on the stage had been taken from her.

In the time between the first spring following her success and the time she left England, she had grown apace. Her thoughts, if not always original, were invariably sound. Her expression of them was always good, though often grammatically entangled. In letters to her friends, chiefly to Harriet, during that period, she had said such things as these:

'I suppose the consolatory element in the beautiful unhuman world in which we live is not often fully appreciated by the young, they want comparatively so little of it; youth is itself so thoroughly its own consoler.'

'I like all that concerns the love adventures of these valorous knights of yore [the Knights of the Round Table]; but their deadly blows and desperate thrusts, their slashing, gashing, mashing, mangling, and hewing bores me to death.'

'. . . the proceedings of Parliament would make one angry if they did

not make one so sad, and some of the debates would seem to be laughable but that I know they are lamentable.'

'I am blessed with such robust health that my moral shortcomings, however anxious I may be to refer them to sideache, toothache, or any other ache . . . deserve small mercy on the score of physical infirmity. . . .'

'The tendency to *heal* is as universal as the liability to smart. You always speak of change with a sort of vague horror that surprises me. Though all things round us are for ever shifting and altering, and though we ourselves vary and change, there is a supreme spirit of steadfastness in the midst of this huge unrest, an abiding, unshaken, immovable principle of good guiding this vanishing world of fluctuating atoms. . . .'

' . . . I am still *too young*; I have not lived, experienced, and suffered enough to have acquired the self-forgetfulness and gentle forbearance that make us good and pleasant companions to our *youngers*.'

' . . . our souls get used to our bodies, and in some fashion alter and shape them to fit, then you know if we had different bodies we should be different people and not our *same selves* at all. . . .'

' . . . with young people generally . . . to retreat from a position you have assumed is to run the risk of losing some of their consideration and respect . . . I believe any indulgence so granted never fails to leave on the youthful mind an impression of want of judgment. . . .'

'My face is too bad for anything but nature. . . .'

'I suppose a parent can love all through a whole lifetime of absence; but do you think there can be a strong and enduring affection in a child's bosom for a parent hardly known excepting by hearsay? I should doubt it.'

'I am in a great hurry, dear, and have written you an inordinately stupid letter; never mind, the next shall be inconceivably amusing. Just now my head is stuffed full of amber-coloured cashmere and white satin.'

On the Reform Bill: ' . . . as soon as these needy folk find out that Reform is really *not* immediate bread and cheese and beer, they will seek something else which they may imagine will be those desired items of existence, and that is what it may be difficult to give them. . . . Society is become a sort of battlefield . . . there appears to be no middle or moderating party, which I think strange and to be deplored. It seems as if it were a mere struggle between the nobility and the mobility, and the middle class—that vast body of good sense, education, and wealth. . . .'

'The Bristol people are rather in a bad state just now for our purposes, for trade here is in a very unprosperous condition and the recent failure of many of their mercantile houses does no good to our theatrical ones. . . .'

'The difference between natural and revealed religion is that the one worships the loveliness and power it perceives, and the other the goodness, mercy, and truth in which it believes.'

' . . . though a statesman may need a hundred eyes, I maintain that a party politician is the better for having only one. Restricted vision is good for work, too; people who see to far and wide can seldom be very hopeful . . . and hope is the very essence of working courage. . . .'

'I do not think if one could put one's heart into one's friends' hand that

they could detect one defect or evil quality that has not been marked and acknowledged in the depths of one's own consciousness.'

'I can't say that I find society pleasant. It reminds me a good deal of a tiresome game, somewhat out of date in its original form, called "Conversation Cards," the insipid flippancy of whose questions and answers seems to me to survive in these meetings miscalled occasionally *conversaziones*. Dancing appears to me rational, and indeed highly intellectual, in comparison with such talk. . . .'

These are some of the thoughts circling round inside Fanny's head. They display remarkable consistency. And more, for they are thoughts of a girl in an age when women were supposed to lack knowledge, political sagacity, and education. It would be interesting to know whether later generations, despite their opportunities, can produce shrewder judgment and observation, greater honesty, in the minds of girls of Fanny's age, between twenty-one and twenty-three years old.

Fanny who had twice braced herself to having to do something she disliked, and, when the necessity finally arrived, hated having to do it, but who had on both occasions done it, was no longer called on to try to save Covent Garden. But though her sole reason for going on the stage had gone, her reason for remaining upon it, certainly until the American tour was over, was even greater. With Covent Garden and its worthless, bankrupting prestige gone, she had still to help Charles stave off the family's ruination. Without the theatre demanding their energies, they were back where Roger Kemble had been when he married Sally Ward in 1753, seventy-nine years before, where Henry Siddons had been when he married Sarah Kemble fifty-nine years before, and when John Philip walked to Liverpool. Without Covent Garden, their money gone save for the share in the theatre, with only their name to aid them, the Kembles were, again, strollers.

CHAPTER VI

(1)

AMERICA in 1832 was a land of strongly-marked contrast. Her population was between thirteen and fourteen million people. Twenty-four States had joined the Union; four States had been added since the Senate and House of Representatives, fourteen years before, had enacted that 'on the admission of every new State one star be added to the Union.'

The twenty-four States were Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North and South Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia: a wide slab of land which swept down and inland from the eastern seaboard, from the northern frontier with Canada, to Florida (which would join the Union thirteen years later), thrust a wedge on to the Gulf of Mexico, from the outskirts of Pensacola to the mouth of the Sabine River, and jumped north in a rough line to the shores of Lake Michigan. Within the space covered by that great slab life thrummed and hummed with activity. Merchants, business men, bankers, shippers, farmers, planters, industrialists, legislators, were busy extending the opportunities they found within their barely known continent.

Their wives, arrayed when opportunity permitted, in the latest creations from Paris, or, like many Englishwomen, in copies of Paris models, or, again, like even more Englishwomen and Frenchwomen, in clothes whose practicality owed no debt to Parisian designers, were sufficiently cool and practical to aid their husbands, if necessary, between bearing their children, tending their homes, keeping up social duties, feeding the flickering flame of religion and morality, or setting out with their men to land beyond the twenty-four States where, in the untamed plains, forests, valleys, deserts, and mountains, life was perilous, primitive, and dominated by toil, and Redskins on the warpath only one obstacle to be overcome.

In New York and Philadelphia, and the other cities, the chief form of transport was the carriage, in one or other shape. Coaches carried the merchants, legislators, planters, bankers, and their families from one town or city to the next. Beyond Illinois the horse and wagon were the only means of travel. Yet, despite every hazard, the wagons rolled west in a steady, ever-increasing stream.

Andrew Jackson, 'Old Hickory,' was president, three years a widower since his wife Rachel had died in the hour of his victory from a heart attack brought on by overhearing stale scandal of her unwitting bigamy in the first years of their marriage. The business over Peggy O'Neill, the tavern-keeper's daughter who married Senator Eaton of Tennessee and moved into Washington, causing much

comment behind the prim curtains of ladies who officially ignored her presence and unofficially discussed it at length, provided the foremost fashionable gossip. Daniel Webster, the Whig, was busy creating trouble for Jackson in this presidential election year, over a renewal of the charter for the United States Bank; Webster who, two years before, had said of federal government: "I hold it to be a popular government, erected by the people; those who administer it, responsible to the people; and itself capable of being amended and modified, just as the people may choose it should be," words which reached the ears of a twenty-one-year-old axe-man splitting fence rails in Illinois; Abraham Lincoln. Up in Boston, William Lloyd Garrison was writing articles against negro slavery in his paper, *The Liberator*. In New York State a twenty-seven-year-old ex-farm-hand was gaining followers for a religion revealed to him by an angel with the strangely Italian surname of Moroni, and whose creed he set forth in a work called *The Book of Mormon*. Across in New York a girl of thirteen was at school, writing scraps of poetry, singing in class; thirty years hence the *Atlantic Monthly* would publish a poem by Julia Ward Howe, under the fine title of *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

It was a hard, rough, virile age. Gold was there, rough-hewn unpolished gold. In many places law depended upon the long rifle and the short gun. Away from their main preoccupation of breaking and taming the soil, the men had every merit and most failings of pioneers. Many were widowers. Life was harsher for their women. Many works have been written on the pioneering days in America, but few have paid the tribute due to the women who lived in them. The overwhelming majority of the women toiled not for their own ease, but for their husband's comfort and a greater chance for their children. When necessity demanded, there was nothing they would not do for their children, for their men, for the women around them, for the community in which they lived. They died of milk-fever, in childbirth, of toil which made many of them lose looks and health before they were middle-aged. They died in wagons rolling westward across the plains, of exposure in the mountains, of heat in the desert—hundreds, sometimes a thousand and more miles from their home. Often their homes lacked medicine, and so did the nearest settlement, a day's ride or more away, devoid of even a pretence at what then constituted medicine and surgery. Their husbands were inclined to be footloose, unfaithful, and died in bar-room brawls, from sickness, plague, or in skirmishes with marauding Indian braves. They shipped in New England, in groups, to round the Horn, land on the western seaboard, to marry unknown husbands. They had another child, kept the community together, passed knowledge of civilization by word of mouth to their children, fought to keep their marriage vows sacred, carried their Bibles into unknown country, and let the men forge ahead in their own way. They were more than great women; they were great souls, blessed with vision and resolve. It was not a woman's country, but much of what America was to become was due to them.

This was the country to which Fanny Kemble came in 1832.

Thirty-five days after she stepped on to the *Pacific* at Liverpool she stepped on to the shore of America, on to the soil of New York.

(2)

Off Sandy Hook,
Wednesday,
5th September, 1832.

'My dearest Harriet,

'. . . (we hear that) the cholera had been bad in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York; the latter town was almost deserted, and the people flying in numbers from the others. This was rather bad news to us, who were going thither to find audiences . . . but it was awful to such as were going back to their homes and families. I looked at the anxious faces gathered round our informer, and thought how the poor hearts were flying, in terrible anticipation of the worst, to the nests where they had left their dear ones, and eagerly counting every precious head in the homes over which so black a cloud of doom had gathered in their absence. . . .'

New York (the same day).

'Here we really are, and perhaps you, who are not here, will believe it more readily than I who am, and to whom it seems an impossible kind of dream from which I must surely presently wake. We made New York Harbour Monday night at sunset, and cast anchor at twelve o'clock off Staten Island, where we lay till yesterday morning at half-past nine, when a steamboat came alongside to take the passengers to shore. A thick fog covered the shores, the rain poured in torrents, but had the weather been more favourable, I should have seen nothing of our approach to the city, for I was crying bitterly. The town, as we drove through it from the landing, struck me as foreign in appearance—continental, I mean. Trees are mixed very prettily with the houses, which are painted of various colours, and have green blinds on the outside, giving an idea of coolness and shade. . . .

'The sunshine is glorious, and the air soft and temperate; our hotel is pleasantly situated, and our rooms are gay and large. The town, as I see it from our windows, reminds me a little of Paris. Yesterday evening the trees and lighted shop-windows and brilliant moonlight were like a suggestion of the boulevards. It is very gay and rather like a fair.

'The cholera has been very bad, but it is subsiding, and the people are returning to town. We shall begin our work in about ten days. I have not told you half I could say, but foolscap will contain no more.'

Those are the first words Fanny wrote when she landed in America. As her acquaintance grew with her new surroundings she was to make criticism. There is no need to defend her from those who have said she had no right to criticize: progress is not well served by those who accept unquestioningly what they find around them and are afraid to voice honest criticism.

(3)

Players in every age have shown understandable interest in the hotels in which they are housed. Theatrical lodgings have been a favourite 'shop-talk' from the days when strollers lodged in barns and stables in exchange for reciting Shakespeare to a tavern's patrons.

Fanny's first letters to Harriet are no exception to the rule. In Britain she had encountered good and bad hotels, and frequently stayed with friends or acquaintances, such as the Wiltons outside Manchester. In New York at first there were few opportunities to stay with friends. She, Charles and Dall had to take what they found in this great, rushing, noisy city whose eyes were fixed so steadfastly on to-morrow that to-day's inconveniences, though known, did not count and to mention which sounded suspiciously like carping unpleasantness: more than one British subject had criticized the hotels, including the bitter Mrs. Trollope, and such comments were not too well received, understandably in the case of Mrs. Trollope.

A fortnight after the Kembles landed, Fanny wrote to Harriet:

'My dearest Harriet,

'What shall I say to you? First of all, pray don't forget me, don't be altered when I see you again, don't die before I get back, don't die if I never come back. . . .

'You cannot imagine how strange the comparisons people here are perpetually making between this wonderful sapling of theirs and our old oak seem to me. . . . My father, thank God, is wonderfully improved in health, looks and spirits. The fine, clear, warm (hot it should be called) atmosphere agrees with him, and the release from the care and anxieties of that troublesome state of his . . . will, I am sure, be of the greatest service to him. He begins his work to-morrow night with *Hamlet* and on Tuesday I act Bianca. It is thought expedient that we should act singly the first two nights, and then make a "constellation." . . .

'Dall is very well, very hot, and very mosquito-bitten. . . . I do nothing but drink iced lemonade, and eat peaches and sliced melon.

'Baths are a much cheaper and commoner luxury (necessary) in the hotels here than with us; a great satisfaction to me, who hope in Heaven, if I ever get there, it will be soft rain-water. . . .

'There are no water-pipes or cisterns in this city such as we have. Men go about as they do in Paris, with huge water-butts, supplying each house daily . . . many improvements which might have been expected to have effected here long ago are halting in their advance, leaving New York ill-paved, ill-lighted, and indifferently supplied with a good many necessaries and luxuries of modern civilization.' [Fanny later stated that in the fifty-six years which elapsed between the time the letter was written and her memoirs published, times had changed.]

'There are, on an average, half a dozen fires in various parts of the town every night—I mean houses on fire. The sons of all the gentlemen here are

volunteer engineers and firemen, and great is the delight they take in tearing up and down the streets, accompanied by red lights, speaking trumpets, and a rushing, roaring escort of running amateur extinguishers, who make night hideous with their bawling and bellowing. This evening, as I was observing that we had had no fire to-day, Dall said the weather was so hot, she thought they must have left off fires for the season.

'The hours which prevail here are those of our shop-keeping population. They rise and go to business very early, dine at three, which indeed is considered late, take tea at five, and supper at nine, which seems to us very primitive. . . . The women here are, generally speaking, very pretty little creatures with a great deal of freshness and brilliance. They dress in the extreme of French fashion. I suppose from some unfavourable influence of the climate, they lose their beauty prematurely—they become full-blown very early, and their bloom is extremely evanescent. . . . There seems to be a great deal of consumption here. The climate is as capricious as ours, with this additional disadvantage, that the extremes of heat and cold are much more intense, and the transitions much more violent, the temperature varying as much as thirty degrees in the twenty-four hours. . . .

'We went through the fish and fruit markets the other day. Unfortunately it was rather late in the morning. The glory of the market was over, but yet there remained enough to enchant us, with their abundant plenteousness of good things. The fruit market was beautiful. Fruit baskets half as high as I am, placed in rows of a dozen, filled with peaches, and painted a bright vermilion colour, which throws a ruddy becoming tint over the downy fruit. It looked like something in the Arabian Nights. Heaps, literally heaps of melons, apples, pears, and wild grapes, in the greatest profusion. I was enchanted with the beautiful forms, bright colours, and fragrant smell, but I saw no flowers, and I have seen hardly any since I have been here, which is rather a grief to me. . . .'

The Kembles were playing at the Park Theatre. Apart from explorations round the city, Fanny's time was absorbed by rehearsals. In the evenings she either dined quietly at the hotel with her father or Dall or went out to dine. On one occasion they supped with Philip Hone, a leading New York politician, on another evening Fanny went to see Lester Wallack perform in *The Rent Day* at the Park Theatre, which made her cry dreadfully, 'but chiefly, I believe, because, when they are ruined he asks his wife if she will go with him to America.'

Fanny found the theatre pretty, of 'the best possible dimensions and tolerably good for the voice.' Charles appeared as Hamlet on 17th September. The following night Fanny had her début, playing opposite an actor, Keppel, who had failed badly as her Romeo in London; the practice of the American theatre in those years was basically that followed by British provincial theatres, employing one or two visiting star players with a company of actors under seasonal contract to the theatre.

Fanny's American début was an outstanding success.

Philip Hone, in his diary, recorded that the final curtain came down amid deafening shouts of approval and the plaudits of an astonished audience. No one

in the audience had ever seen an actress equal to her. The *New York Mirror* of 22nd September acclaimed her the outstanding female actress of the day.

Hone's opinion is interesting. In his diary he had noted that 'Miss Kemble, like all young persons who have become celebrated, has many admirers. Her manners are somewhat singular. Allowances must be made for her, just arrived among strangers, one of the lions of the day, and, as such, an object of curiosity. She talks well but will only talk when, and to whom, she chooses, and she has an air of nonchalance not calculated to make her a favourite with the beaux. . . . She has astonishing requisites for the stage. . . . I am of the opinion that she does not like her profession. It is not her favourite theme of conversation. Her father is a gentleman of fine manners and dignified deportment, somewhat stiff—he is a Kemble. . . .'

It is a failing of nervous, sensitive people, finding it difficult to talk easily to strangers, to become stiff by adopting a role which breeds in them a sensation of ease if not of comfort, while away from their home and familiar surroundings.

Fanny played Bianca, Mrs. Haller, and Juliet. New York audiences loved her, despite the strangeness of a restrained type of acting which was unusual in their theatres. Morse, in his *Life and Letters of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, states that Holmes described her as 'a very fine affair.' Little Clara Ogden saw her as Juliet and wrote: 'Never have I beheld any creature so perfectly bewitching, the tones of her voice were richest music. . . . I laughed and wept immoderately,' and, emboldened by Fanny's performance, went on to become an actress and playwright herself. Fitz-Greene Halleck spoke of her performances with enthusiasm, carrying the memories of those first nights through his life. On 13th October, 1832, the *New York Mirror* said that a new era in American stage history had begun with the Kembles' visit; they attracted people 'who had been strangers to the theatre, the serious and the gay, the aged and the young.' A boy in his 'teens saved pennies to make the trip from Brooklyn to New York to see her; years later he wrote: 'Fanny Kemble! Name to conjure up great mimic scenes withal—perhaps the greatest. . . . She came to give America that young maturity and roseate power in all their noon, or rather forenoon, flush. . . . Nothing finer did any stage ever exhibit—the veterans of all nations said so, and my boyish heart and head felt it in every minute cell.' The boy was Walt Whitman.

Every week there were four performances at the theatre, every day there were rehearsals. Nevertheless Fanny made time to explore parts of the city and write of what she found out about it and the people who lived there, and the drawbacks.

> 'We are all pretty well, but all but devoured by multitudinous and multifarious beasts of prey—birds, I suppose they are; mosquitoes, ants, and flies, by day; and flies, fleas, and worse, by night. . . .'

In the same letter appears her first comment upon slavery, which was to have great bearing upon her life later and to cause her to play a part in shaping the progress of the ninteenth century:

'The steward of our ship, a black—a very intelligent, obliging, respectable servant—came here the other morning to ask my father for an order [free seat], at the same time adding that it must be for the gallery, as people of colour were not allowed to go into any other part of the theatre. *Qu'en dis-tu?* The prejudice against these unfortunate people is, of course, incomprehensible. On board ship, after giving that same man some trouble, Dall poured him out a glass of wine, when we were having our dinner, whereupon the captain looked at her with utter amazement, and I thought some little contempt, and said, "Ah, one can tell by that that you are not an American," which sort of thing makes one feel rather glad that one is not.'

A flashback to her dislike of acting appears in another letter, when she replied to a point raised by Harriet:

' . . . Perhaps, as you say, it is morbid to dwell as I do upon the unreality of acting, because its tangible reality makes its appearance duly every morning with the "returns" of the preceding night. But I am not sure that it is morbid to consider wants exaggerated and necessities unreal which render insufficient earnings that would be ample for anyone's real need. A livelihood, of course, we could make in England. . . .'

And in the same letter:

'Bad as your mice, of which you complain so bitterly, may be, they are civilized Christian creatures compared with the heathen swarms with which we wage war incessantly here. Every evening, as soon as the sun sets, clouds of mosquitoes begin their war-dance round us. . . . I tear myself like a maniac, and then, instead of oil, pour aromatic vinegar into my wounds, and a very pretty species of torture is produced by that means, I assure you. We have swarms of flies, which also bite and sting, with a venomous rancour of which I should have thought their frivolity incapable.'

The first New York engagement ended on 7th October. The plays presented were *Hamlet*, *Fazio*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The School for Scandal*, *Venice Preserved*, *King John*, *The Hunchback*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Inconstant*. The four Shakespeare plays appear to have been the most popular, awaking considerable interest on account of the unusually restrained acting of both Fanny and her father. Sheridan's *School for Scandal* was an established favourite. *The Inconstant* was a Restoration comedy of manners, by George Farquhar (author of *The Beaux' Stratagem* and *The Constant Couple;* the latter was revived in London as recently as the autumn of 1945), and had been first produced in 1702. *The Hunchback* was a new play by James Sheridan Knowles, in which Fanny originally created the role of Julia.

A few days later they were on their way to Philadelphia, the Quaker city. The journey started on a steamboat which took them to New Jersey, where they climbed off the boat and into the Camden and Amboy railway, where the coaches were drawn by four horses. Then came another journey by steamboat up the

Delaware to the city. Here she wrote to Harriet, telling her that Charles's health had greatly improved and that she liked Philadelphia better than New York:

'It has altogether a rather dull, sober, mellow hue, which is more agreeable than the glaring newness of New York. There are one or two fine public buildings, and the quantity of clean, cool-looking white marble which they use for both their public edifices and for the doorsteps of the private houses has a simple and sumptuous appearance, which is pleasant. It is electioneering time, and all last night the streets resounded with cheers and shouts, and shone with bonfires. The present President, Jackson, appears to be far from popular here. . . .

'. . . I like what I have read of Graham (*History of the United States*) very much; the matter is very interesting, and the spirit in which it is treated; and I am deeply in love with Captain John Smith, and wonder greatly at Pocohontas marrying anybody else. . . .

'I have been to my first rehearsal here to-day. The theatre [the Chestnut Street Theatre] is small, but pretty enough. The public has high pretensions to considerable critical judgment and literary and dramatic taste, and scouts the idea of being led by the opinion of New York. . . . [This may be due to Philadelphia critics having prophesied Charles's failure, as he was correct and elegant, but stiff and lifeless.] It is rather tiresome that fools are cut upon the same pattern all the world over.'

And later in the same letter:

'I acted here last night for the first time. Dall and my father say that I received my reception very ungraciously. I am sure I am very sorry, I did not mean to do so, but I really had not the heart or the face to smile and look as pleased and pleasant as I can at a parcel of strangers. . . . I was not well, or in spirits, and labouring under a severe cold, which I acquired on board the steamboat that brought us down the Delaware. . . . The colours of the autumnal foliage are rich and beautiful beyond imagination—crimson and gold, like a regal mantle, instead of the sad russet cloak of our fading woods. I think, beautiful as this is, that its gorgeousness takes away from the sweet solemnity that makes the fall of the year pre-eminently the season of thoughtful contemplation. Our autumn at home is mellow and harmonious, though sometimes melancholy; but the brilliancy of this decay strikes one sometimes with a sudden sadness, as if the whole world were dying of consumption, with these glittering gleams and hectic flushes, a mere deception of disease and death. . . .'

Towards the end of the month she wrote a longer letter, in which, having told Harriet that she ate 'little, drinks less, rehearses six mornings and acts five nights a week,' and has 'grown so fat that I really cannot perceive that there is any shape in particular about me; grotesque things sometimes are melancholy too, and it is so with me, for I am both,' she refers again to her work and the reasons for continuing it:

'Ours is a very strange trade, and I am sorry to say that every day increases my distaste for it. . . . I do not think that during my father's lifetime I shall ever leave the stage. It is very selfish to feel regret at this, I know, but it sometimes seems to me rather dreary to look along my future years, and think that they will be devoted to labour that I dislike and despise. . . . For many years—ever since I entered upon my first girlhood, indeed—a quiet, lonely life upon a small independence has been the aim of my desires and my notion of happiness. . . . My father has hitherto been able to lay by nothing, and my assistance is absolutely necessary to him. . . and as long as I can in any way serve my father's interests by remaining in my profession I shall do so, and most naturally look forward to a prolonged period of my present exertions. . . .'

Then occurs a comment whose significance may have been far more important to Fanny's future life than her other biographers have realized:

'It is useless pondering . . . but I have been led to do so lately from a letter which my father received from Mr. Bartley, the stage manager of Covent Garden, the other day, which contained the plan of a new theatrical speculation, in which he is most anxious to engage us. . . . I do not know how my father feels upon this subject. . . . I am determined that neither Mr. L's [Laporte's] opinion, nor that of the whole world besides, should induce me to own the value of a truss of straw in any theatre. . . . I am determined to own neither part nor lot in any such venture; I will lend or give anything that I may earn to it, and I will act at half the price I might elsewhere; but not a demonstrable cent per cent profit should induce me to run such a risk of cursing the day that I was born, as to become owner of a theatre.'

After a return to New York, she was suddenly, sharply nostalgic for her homeland:

'Four months are already gone out of the two years we are to pass out of England. Dear England! My heart dwells with affectionate pride upon the beauty and greatness and goodness of my own country—that wonderful little land, that mere morsel of earth as it seems on the map—so full of power, of wealth, of intellectual vigour and moral worth!'

The months went by. Fanny, Charles and Dall travelled along new roads, to Baltimore, to Washington, then back to Philadelphia and New York again. They were in New York in February when Fanny wrote to Harriet:

' . . . it is not impossible that I may never return to England again to reside there. See it again, I will, please God to grant me life and eyes, but the state of my father's property in Covent Garden is such that it seems more than likely that he may never be able to return to England without risking the little which these toilsome last years will have enabled him to earn for the support of his own and my mother's old age. He will be compelled, in all

likelihood, to settle and die abroad, as my uncle John did, by the liabilities of that ruinous possession of theirs, the first theatre in London. When first my father communicated this chance to me, and expressed his determination, should the affairs of the theatre remain in their present situation, to buy a small farm in Normandy, and go and live there, my heart sank terribly. This was very different from my girlish dreams of a life of lonely independence among the Alps, or by the Mediterranean. The idea of living entirely out of England seems to me now very sad for us all. . . . However there are earth and skies out of England . . . if God vouchsafe me my faculties, and I can bid farewell to this life of distasteful toil, I have visions of studies and pursuits which I think might make existence very happy on a farm in Normandy, though such might not have been my own choice. . . .'

But it was not to a Normandy farm that Fanny was to find her way. It was to a farm just outside Philadelphia and a Georgia plantation.

In Philadelphia she had scored a great success, particularly with the young men. Henry Wickoff, himself a young man about town, was to say that her performance in *Fazio* 'stamped Fanny Kemble in my mind as the greatest of living actresses,' and after *The Hunchback* had been performed that Philadelphia 'went Kemble mad; the affecting phrases of the idolized Julia were repeated at every corner. . . . I did nothing but frequent the theatre and abandon myself to the fascinations of this bewitching actress.' So did other young men. Among their number was one Pierce Butler. Butler introduced Fanny to his cousin, Thomas Sully, a young painter, whose portraits of her are amongst the best, and are now in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Sully was not satisfied with his first efforts to paint her and he and his cousin were frequent attendants at the theatre, he to watch for a glimpse which would inspire him to a better portrait, Butler for a very different reason.

Pierce Mease Butler was young and rich, part-owner with his brother of rice and cotton plantations in Georgia, worked by some hundreds of negro slaves. He had practised law and was a musician of some accomplishment, with a penchant for playing the flute. His maternal grandfather had been a major in the British Army, who married into a prominent South Carolina family. At what moment Pierce Butler ceased to be the infatuated admirer and saw himself in the role of Fanny's husband cannot be determined, neither can the moment when Fanny decided to accept him in the role or what prompted her decision: it may be suspected that any letters to Harriet upon the subject are among those she destroyed. Her diary refers to a riding party to which she went with her father and Dall and then says that her host returned to their hotel with them and stayed to dinner. That may well have been Butler, whom Wickoff records as having been determined to 'carry off the splendid prize, and was envied and almost detested by a swarm of rivals.'

Throughout the remainder of the time scheduled for Fanny and Charles to act in America, Butler was always somewhere near.

The theatres were crowded wherever she appeared. The first sixty nights that she and Charles appeared in New York brought into the box office something

in the neighbourhood of £14,000, out of a total of some £37,500 for the whole nine-month season. Charles was not the draw; he gained a full house only on his benefit night. Fanny drew crowded houses every time. The same was true of the following season, when they played in Boston, again at the Park Theatre in New York; in January, 1834, in Washington, Baltimore, and Philadelphia; in February, in Boston and New York; in March and April in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Boston, in May in New York and Philadelphia. At the eight benefits for them in New York in that year they averaged over £300. In Boston for eighteen nights the box office gained nearly £3,000, a sum considered high in those days.

Away from the stage Fanny went the social round of the times, met a number of important people, and saw the sights, natural and man-made. She visited the White House in Washington, 'a comfortless, handsome-looking building, with a withered grass-plot enclosed in wooden palings in front'; she met that 'fine old well-battered soldier', Andrew Jackson; she enjoyed Boston, 'one of the pleasantest towns imaginable' where the houses were 'of fine granite, and have an air of wealth and solidity unlike anything we have seen elsewhere in this country, many of the streets planted with trees, chiefly fine horse-chestnuts, which were in full leaf and blossom when we came away', and where, among the Harvard students who thronged the Tremont Theatre, was young Charles Sumner, to become her good friend in later years. There was a short holiday trip to Montreal and a short holiday to Niagara, to which they were accompanied by Butler and Edward Trelawny, the writer who had known Byron and Shelley and who described for her Byron's death at Misselonghi. Fanny was fascinated by Trelawny:

> 'He is a curious being, a savage in some respects, a giant for strength and ability, taller, straighter and broader than most men, yet with the most listless indolent carelessness of gait, and an uncertain wandering way of dropping his feet to the ground as if he didn't know where he was going, and didn't much wish to go anywhere. His face is as dark as a Moor's, with a wild strange look about the eyes and forehead, and a mark like a scar upon his cheek; his whole appearance giving one an idea of toil, hardship, peril, and wild adventure. The expression of his mouth is remarkably sweet, and his voice is low and gentle. His hands are as brown as a labourer's. He never profanes them with gloves, but wears two strange, magical-looking rings; one of them, which he showed me, is made of elephant's hair.'

Fanny loved Niagara Falls. She could scarcely restrain herself when the party neared them:

> 'A frenzy of impatience seized upon me. I could have set off and run the whole way, and when at length the carriage stopped at Niagara House, waiting neither for my father, Dall or Pierce, I rushed down the footpath cut in the rocks. Trelawny followed me. Down, down I sprang, and saw through boughs the white glimmer of a sea of foam—Trelawny shouted, "Go on! Go on." In another minute I stood upon the Table Rock.

Trelawny seized me by the arm and, without a word, dragged me to the brink. I saw Niagara—Oh, God! who can describe that sight!'

In a letter to Harriet a few days later she said that her time was spent 'under the water, on the water, and more than half in the water. Wherever foot could stand I stood, and wherever foot could go I went. I crept, clung, hung and waded. I stood alone under the arch, water thundering overhead and the noonday sun looking like a pale wafer, drenched through, almost blown off my feet—bare for safety—and my delight was so intense that I could not bear to come away.'

Driving back, near Rochester, their coach overturned. Charles was thrown on top of Fanny; Trelawny was unconscious in the roadway, Butler was uninjured; Dall was found sitting in the road, her face covered in blood from a severe wound. Dall had been badly injured. From New York, on 24th April, 1834, Fanny wrote to Harriet:

'This will be but a short letter, the first short one you will have received from me since we parted. Dear Dall has gone from us. She is dead. She died in my arms and I closed her eyes. . . . I cannot attempt to speak of this now, I will give you all details in my next letter. It has been a dreadful shock, though it was not unexpected, but there is no preparation for the sense of desolation which oppresses me, and which is beyond words. . . . I wrote you a long letter a few days ago, which will perhaps have led you to anticipate this. We shall probably be in England on the 10th of July. . . . The sole care of my father, who is deeply afflicted, and charge of everything, devolves entirely on me now. . . . We left Boston on Tuesday. . . . I act here to-night for the first time since I lost that dear and devoted friend, who was ever near at hand to think of everything for me, to care for me in every way. I have almost cried my eyes out daily for the last three months, but that is over now. I am working again, and go about my work feeling stunned and bewildered. . . .

'I saw Dr. Chaning on Monday, he has just lost a dear and intimate connection. With what absolute faith he spoke of her! Gone! to the Author of all good. That which was good must return to Him. It is true, and I believe it, and know it, but at first I was lost. . . .'

That letter was written late in April. On 6th June, Fanny and Charles appeared for the last time at the Chestnut Street Theatre, in Philadelphia. Less than a fortnight later she gave what she believed to be her last performance on the stage, and Charles prepared for return to England alone.

On 7th June, 1834, Fanny had married Butler in Christ Church, Philadelphia.

(4)

What prompted her marriage? It is difficult to decide. She may have been in love with Butler, but there is reason to doubt it. Women of Fanny's inde-



'Tragedy abounded'
FANNY KEMBLE as EUPHRASIA, 1830



Mrs. Pierce Butler as JULIET

pendence of spirit and intelligence do not leave the men they love unless there is provocation. Differences between Butler's outlook and her own, between his relatives and her, between American public opinion and her over her book, due to appear within a few years, are not really sufficient, not for a woman who loves. Butler's failings were those with which she had had a chance to become acquainted as tendencies if not as facts.

Were there other reasons which, knowing herself attracted to Butler and believing she might come to love him, she saw as sufficient justification for her action?

The American tour was ending. A decision on whether she should remain there had to be made quickly. It is significant that she married Butler only a few days before they were due to leave. She may well have feared that Charles would become embroiled with Covent Garden again directly they returned to London. She did not want that, had told Harriet she would not lift her finger to help the theatre, and may well have believed that without her help her father would be unable to become involved again: the American tour, following her experiences in London and while touring the provinces, had shown her that she was the attraction, not Charles. Meanwhile, he was taking back what they had earned in America and by remaining behind, the wife of a wealthy man, she would be able to let him take their full earnings, sufficient to look after him and her mother for some while. Without herself and Dall, the family's expenses would be less. Henry, her brother, was in the army; the others were growing up. Perhaps Dall's death added its weight to helping her reach her decision; she may well have thought that without this devoted friend to turn to, her life as an actress would be unendurable.

Fanny was intelligent. She may have turned over these thoughts in her mind and been prepared to bargain on an affection which she believed would turn into love, in exchange for her father's lack of opportunity to make a continuation of his earlier misery, and provide her own freedom from a life she hated. Women have contracted marriage with less worthy motives and less honesty.

And so, in 1834, Fanny left the stage, believing it would be a final parting. She had gained success in her own country. She had gained it in America. Joseph Ireland, in his *Records of the New York Stage from* 1750–1860, was to describe her as the most intellectual, passionate, and original English actress of the age. 'To the state and dignity of the Kemble school she added the fire and impetuosity of her own original genius; from her mother she inherited a grace and fascination in her comic delineations that no other of the blood of Kemble ever knew. In girlhood she had a dainty lightness of figure; her glorious dark eyes, soft in repose, could with a single glance express the intensest shade of every varying passion.' Her triumph in America was complete; she was the acknowledged Queen of Tragedy from Boston to New Orleans, without a rival near her throne. 'To her, whom all eyes admired, and all tongues praised, wooers of course thronged in—hearts and fortunes were laid at her feet.'

Not quite all tongues. The editor of the *Germantown Telegraph* had voiced a contrary opinion the previous October when he wrote that 'He who weds her for an angel will discover, we opine, ere a fortnight that she is nothing more or less than a woman, and perhaps one of the most troublesome kind in the bargain.'

Within a few years Butler was to echo the editor's opinion, when he found that Fanny did not fit into his concept of what a woman should be like, what rights and privileges a wife and mother should have to express herself freely, and where his own rights ceased.

But that was eleven years later, five years after their second visit to England, and after their two daughters had been born.

When Charles left for England, Fanny had no knowledge that on 10th September, 1845, she would follow him back to England, to resume her career on the stage, again at the dictate of necessity.

CHAPTER VII

(1)

IT would be interesting to know what thoughts occupied Fanny's mind when she stepped ashore at Liverpool in October, 1845. Throughout the voyage she had had much to think about, much to look back upon, much to speculate upon with regard to her future. Her marriage had not been a happy one. Perhaps her action in returning to England, alone, would make the future happier than she had reason to imagine. But she could not afford to base the future upon a possibility . . . a vague possibility, if the past were a true guide. She was that greatest tragedy of womankind, an intelligent, lonely woman, doomed to lack forever sufficient love to sweeten intelligence and sufficient intelligence to create love from loneliness.

Let the record of her marriage speak for itself.

Trouble between Butler and herself commenced within a few months of their taking residence at Butler Place, her husband's home, a few miles outside Philadelphia, to which he took her on 1st January of the year following their marriage. The initial cause of their dispute was unusual in that age, and stupid. Fanny had copied out the journal she had made of her first impressions of America, collated since she had arrived there, and announced her intention of trying to get them published, partly to give Dall's grave a good headstone. Butler opposed the project. Why he should have done so appears stupid from the viewpoint of a later age, but Butler believed it would be harmful to have *his* wife labelled a professional writer and was afraid that her forthright expression, her frequent indiscretions of good taste, would offend other people if such indiscretions appeared in cold print. Fanny refused to give up her intention. She saw no reason not to continue with her plan, she told him. Butler then sought a solution by appointing himself editor of the book, demanding that he have the unquestioned right to expunge passages or incidents from the journal as he thought fit. Fanny refused this dictate. She had no intention of hurting or harming anyone by what she said in the book, her purpose was to give an honest comment upon what she had seen and she had a right to do so. The dispute ended uneasily. Fanny told Butler she would leave him unless he agreed to letting her manage her literary affairs in her own way; for his part, Butler is reported to have offered the publisher £2,500 to suppress the book. The offer was refused. Fanny was the leading actress in the American theatre; she had married an American; her opinions and impressions on America and what was then the American way of life offered the publisher far more than the figure held out by Butler.

Within the next few months a number of minor incidents occurred to make Fanny realize she was not yet equipped to fit into ordinary everyday life in America. Some of these incidents were laughable; some contained within them

the germs of more serious consequence. There was her offer to teach her neighbours' children without payment; an offer which was interpreted as containing a vague insult to local education, local wages, and local pride. At Fourth of July celebrations that year she offered Quaker visitors beer and wine. Then there was the senseless misunderstanding over Fanny's wish to have fresh butter on her table every day, a natural wish which became miserably entangled with matters of machinery, the size of butter churns, and the independent status of the dairymaid.

The trouble foreseen by Butler over Fanny's diary was proven to be true directly the book reached the critics. The fault was not entirely attributable to Fanny. American newspaper critics were still smarting under the sting of what they felt to be the bitter, sarcastic, derogatory pens of British writers who had visited America and written out their not always careful observations. The critics were on the look-out for any fresh British writer whose criticisms were stringent. When Fanny's journal appeared many of them believed that they had found what they had been hunting for since the time of Mrs. Trollope. One of them stated that Fanny had unsexed herself. Another said that the journal was one of the most deplorable exhibitions of vulgar thinking and vulgar expression he had ever encountered. Others formed a different opinion. The *Quarterly Review* thought the journal contained many beautiful descriptions, a number of just and forceful observations on the conditions of society, discriminating criticisms of actors and acting, which made up for sturdy prejudices, hasty opinions, and some ungenerous sarcasms. The critic for the *Southern Literary Messenger* failed to find a single deliberate attempt either to misrepresent or deprecate America. This critic was a voice crying in the wilderness. The day went to the overwhelming majority, who succeeded in working up considerable feeling against the book and its authoress, and helped the book's sales enormously. More importantly for Fanny, the storm she had created helped to convince Butler that he had been wholly justified and that she could not be relied on again. She had committed some unpardonable indiscretions; in future, he could be sure that he knew better than she. There, for the moment, the matter rested.

On 28th May of the same year Fanny gave birth to her first daughter, Sarah. The year was also important as being the first in which she became aware of what was meant by slave-worked plantations. Her understanding of the slave question was still gained at second hand, but the principles involved caused her considerable unhappiness. With Fanny, to be against something was sufficient reason for doing something about it. She did it now. She sat down and wrote a lengthy, irate treatise against the principle and practice of slavery. She made no attempt to have the work published. In deference to Butler's position, and fearful lest their fellow-citizens should arrive in force to tear down and fire the Butler home, she kept it securely locked away.

In the autumn of 1836 Butler and his brother went south to the plantations. Fanny, disappointed at not accompanying them, crossed the Atlantic to London, accompanied by Sarah and a nursemaid. She found London 'more beautiful, more rich, and more royal' than ever. Her friends were glad to have her back. Lord Lansdowne helped her to witness the first meeting of Queen Victoria and her Parliament. In the Green Park one day she became acquainted with

Wordsworth, 'a gentle rill of speech.' In Philadelphia she had experienced some disappointment in having few of her earlier opportunities of meeting and discussing ideas with some of the great figures of the age. Back in London she was able to indulge to her heart's content and wasted no opportunity to do so. In August she went to Liverpool to meet Butler and they returned to America at the end of September.

Shortly before they got back to Butler Place her play *The Star of Seville* had been performed at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. Emboldened by this success Fanny sat down and commenced work on what was to be her best, and last, dramatic work, a play entitled *An English Tragedy*. The work owes much to *The Gamester*, in which she had acted, but shows a marked improvement in dramatic skill. The story tells how Lord Alford, a reckless, wastrel young man-about-town, becomes involved with the young wife of his friend, Judge Winthrop, and is responsible for ruining their lives. Alford escapes all censure for his part in this tragedy. Later, however, he is found guilty of having cheated at gambling by using a loaded dice. For this action he is made an outcast: cheating with dice is a more damnable social sin than betraying the friendship of a friend. This plot, typically Fanny in its reasoning, is shrewd and intelligent, and the way in which she worked it out was as good as the original idea. Macready read it and noted in his diary that 'Mrs. Butler's play (is) one of the most powerful of the modern plays I have seen—most painful, almost shocking, but full of power, poetry, and pathos.'

On 28th May the following year, the second birthday of little Sarah, Fanny gave birth to her second daughter, Frances Anne, known as Fan.

In the following December came the beginning of the long, unhappy quarrel between Fanny and her husband, occasioned by a visit to the plantations made by the entire family.

(2)

The conditions in which Fanny found the negroes living and working, the state of their dwelling-places, horrified her. She had heard of how the negroes lived. She had not believed such things possible on her own husband's plantations. Yet here was the plain, unavoidable proof. Fanny was shocked beyond measure. Each new day of the weeks they spent in Georgia, first at one plantation and then at the other, added its quota to the unhappiness she experienced. Other women might have been able to turn a blind eye to what they saw. But not Fanny. Day after day she went out, seeing, hearing, talking, living through a nightmare of suffering. The tragedy was that each time she sought to find those responsible for the conditions she was forced back directly to her husband and his brother. They owned the plantations: who else could be responsible? And neither of them saw any reason for making an attempt either to change or to improve the negroes' lot. In Philadelphia, while writing her treatise against the slave system, she had tried to persuade Butler to share with her in working out a new system for the negroes. On the plantations she tried again. Her attempt met with no success. Butler was either incapable of seeing the human values involved or feared that by humouring her he would hurt his own pocket.

The misery Fanny endured in this situation can be imagined. She was not a woman who could accept life at face value and be content to ensure her own welfare. She was one of those who are for ever tormented by a need to justify their existence, the living example of those who believe that as they will not pass this way again they must do whatever good they can; the true, if not the only revolutionary.

Driven into herself, hating every moment spent on the plantations which kept the Butlers wealthy and at their ease, she compiled her most famous work, the *Journal of a Residence on a Georgia Plantation*. During the day she went out on the plantations, among the negroes, doing the unheard-of thing of making excursions with them without another white person. In the evening she wrote her new *Journal*. In its pages she voiced a number of impossible ideas—she admitted as much in later years—but her sympathies were roused; passion outweighed the quieter tones of reason. When she left the plantations in April, never to return—her brother-in-law flatly refused to have her there again—the journal was complete. She had, however, learned discretion; she made no immediate attempt to have the *Journal* published.

When the family returned to Philadelphia the breach between Fanny and Butler had widened considerably. What sort of atmosphere marked their days must be surmised, as no records exist, but it is on record that within a short time Butler asked Charles and Elizabeth Sedgwick, two of her best friends, to prevent her leaving him. It was said that Fanny had been so shocked by what she had found accepted as normal conditions on the plantations that she refused to continue being dependent upon the money Butler made from them. The Sedgwicks gave Butler their aid immediately and without question. They invited Fanny to spend an extended holiday with them at their home in Lenox, Massachusetts, where she could think over all that was involved and gradually recover from the first shock of her experience. She remained with the Sedgwicks until October. Butler's subsequent action appears peculiar. Within a few weeks of Fanny's return to Butler Place he announced his intention of spending the winter on the plantations and prepared to depart immediately. Such a decision does not suggest that they had reached a satisfactory agreement. The fact that he did not actually leave until February does not outweigh the peculiarity of his decision, for the delay was caused by his being taken unwell and being confined to the house for the greater part of the two months. Directly he was fit enough to leave he did so, leaving Fanny alone with the two children.

A letter she wrote him, within a few days of his departure, has a significant ending:

> 'I grieve to hear of your low spirits, though 'tis some relief to me to think that I am not now near you to wear and harass you, and produce the depression you complain of. . . . God bless you. Ever your own wife,
>
> 'FANNY.'

Butler later produced this letter as evidence against Fanny. Here, again, his action is peculiar. Truly, the letter contains an admission of her acknowledgment that she has caused his 'depression.' It is strange that he should have decided to

have kept such a letter to use against her, as other letters will show. The letter does not condemn Fanny as directly as he appears to have believed. To any average intelligence the sentiment shown in the letter exceeds the statement that she has been told that she depresses him. It is not a tirade, demanding to know why he should make such a statement; it is not a rebuttal of the charge. On the contrary, it suggests a woman who is genuinely regretful for having caused her husband worry and prepared to accept his statement that harm had been done to him. Fanny was a quick-tempered, volatile woman, given to hours of great worry and, in all probability, of anger, but, like her kind, her temper was quickly expended and she genuinely regretted her share in such times.

Other letters from Fanny, during Butler's absence in Georgia, confirm this opinion.

When Butler returned to Philadelphia three months later Fanny was still contrite. She begged him to go to Warm Springs, Virginia, or to Germany, to regain his health: this suggests that Butler had decided to become ill until such time as Fanny agreed to him without question, for the gentleman had been away in a better climate for three months but reported himself as still being unwell when he returned to Butler Place. Fanny said that she would accompany him, if he wished, or would remain at home; the final decision was to be his. She also promised not to mention slavery again—an open admission that it had formed part of their quarrel—as she realized that no words of her could dispel an attitude in him that had been formed while he was still a boy.

This does not sound like the utterance of a cold or unloving woman. Instead it sounds much like a worried, loving woman attempting to deny her intelligence in order to safeguard and preserve her marriage, her husband's and her own chance of happiness, and, above all, the well-being of their children. Fanny had become a woman and was doing what a good many other women have done to protect her home.

In the November following Butler's return to Philadelphia, Fanny received an urgent message from London. Charles was ill; if she wished to see him alive she would have to hurry. Fanny wasted no time. On the first day of December the Butler family sailed from New York for Liverpool.

Charles Kemble did not die. His wiry constitution pulled him through the second illness, as it had pulled him through the first. It was spring the following year before he regained health, but he did so.

Fanny enjoyed the first months of the holiday. It was good to slip back into the old way of life, renew old friendships, and find out what was new in London. There was excitement too. In Fanny's absence a new Kemble had appeared in the theatre; her younger sister, Adelaide. Adelaide had studied singing at home and abroad. At her first appearance in Italy, in the opera *Norma*, she had gained an outstanding success. She too was in London. The Kemble house was crowded with people, Charles's friends arriving to cheer his convalescence, Adelaide's friends to discuss her career, which was to continue during the summer with a tour of the Rhine in the company of Liszt.

The Butlers accompanied Adelaide on the tour; it was from this tour that Fanny gained her love of the German country. Liszt was then thirty years old, at the height of his popularity as a pianist, the most brilliant showman since the

heyday of Paganini. He had only recently emerged from his stormy romance with the romantically-minded Countess d'Agoult. He was doing well for himself; jewelled sabres were presented to him by admiring governments and princelings, entranced ladies of the nobility of a dozen countries swooned at his feet, his green gloves waved gaily from concert-hall platforms in most European countries, he boasted a fresh cravat for every day of the year, and was enjoying life. To tour with him as a singer was a great success for Adelaide. The tour ended in the autumn amid a swirl of excitement.

Back in London again, the Butlers were immediately caught up in the preliminary stages of the winter season. Fanny appears to have had her fill of people by this time, but enjoyed talking to people and did so until, as she told Harriet, she suffered of 'mind-ache'. At the beginning of October, Adelaide made her début at Covent Garden. It was a wholly successful event and appears to have set Charles thinking about the future of Covent Garden once again, as will be seen. A few weeks later Fanny was presented to Queen Victoria and the Dowager Queen Adelaide.

In the same month as Adelaide's Covent Garden début the first spark in the final disruption of Fanny's marriage flared up. The cause confirms the opinion which has been gained of Butler's mentality from his previous attitude to her during matters in dispute. With it came suspicions of a graver nature.

Some short time before Fanny had received a letter from the editor of a New York anti-slavery paper inquiring about the diary she had kept while on the Georgia plantations and wanting to purchase it for publication. Butler instructed Fanny to ignore the letter. She told him that she never ignored a letter and intended to reply, but to the effect that the diary was not for sale. To prove her good will, having written the letter she gave it to him to seal and mail. The letter was never sent. Butler hid it away in a drawer of their writing-desk and there she found it. Fanny was furious, and typically indiscreet. She immediately wrote the editor another letter, explaining why there had been no previous reply.

The second incident served only to increase her anger. She was never happy when she had no opportunity to write to some purpose and, to pay off a milliner's account, had undertaken to translate and adapt for the stage Dumas's *Mademoiselle de Belle Isle*. While working on the translation it dawned upon her that whatever earnings she might gain, from any of her work, they were not legally hers: the law decreed that they belonged to her husband. Fanny found the two injustices of his being permitted to withhold her letters and her having to pass her money to him, utterly and completely irreconcilable. They offended her intelligence; not unnaturally.

Suddenly, without previous warning, she heard rumours that Butler was amusing himself with another woman.

Characteristically, anger prompted Fanny to action. In April, the following year, shortly after hearing of Butler's action, she left London for Liverpool, alone, intending to return to America.

That was the first occasion on which she left Butler. Other occasions followed within the next few months. She was for ever encountering difficulty with Butler's belief that all he had to do was to lay down the family law for it to be immediately obeyed. And her action in leaving him, not once, but on several

occasions, suggests that she had reason to believe he provided no satisfactory answer to whatever questions she put to him.

In the *Statement* Butler subsequently issued the following passage is worthy of note:

> 'On my soul and conscience I have done everything in my power to make you happy and contented as my wife. I have not succeeded, God knows; but if I have not, at least I can console myself with the knowledge that the fault is not with me. The fault has been entirely your own. . . . If you will govern your irritable temper, and if you can consent to submit your will to mine, we may be reconciled and may be happy.'

'Submit your will to mine' and 'we may be reconciled and may be happy.' It is a grim wording, denying her any real liberty. Can Butler really have thought that she could agree to such an unconditional surrender of her every thought and belief, in exchange for a very hazy chance of happiness? That may have been his belief. Or did he choose the words carefully, knowing she would realize that she could never be happy in such circumstances and, being honest, would say so, thereby giving him grounds for claiming that she refused to obey him and work for their happiness? It is a possibility, though it cannot be confirmed.

In the same *Statement* Butler claimed that Fanny had said he was a husband who was not a husband, but one who offered her only companionship, friendship, and a love without rights—a fairly adequate description it would seem from his own terms—and further that he had already suffered too much unhappiness to risk a further repetition of the situation between them.

How different was Fanny's attitude! When he refused to admit her to their London home, she wrote him a letter which begged his pardon, assured him that she appreciated her failings, and offered every assurance that 'a fallible human could' of her desire to fulfil her duties to him, but said that she could not accept terms of reconciliation which her conscience forbade her to accept. Nevertheless, she begged him to make some arrangement with her which would enable her to be returned to her child. Butler made no reply to their appeal. She waited a few days and then took the initiative into her own hands. One midnight a few weeks later, she knocked on the front door of his house, knowing that he could not refuse her admittance in such circumstances.

Mystery surrounds their relationship from this date onwards. Butler stated that there was no reconciliation between them, and that they maintained separate establishments in the same household until February 1843. Fanny, however, also stated that from the autumn of 1842 there was no resumption of the relationship of husband and wife between them.

The return to Philadelphia in May 1843 only brought the sordid story to its conclusion.

In the summer Butler sold Fanny's riding horse. She replied by collecting together ninety-odd poems she had written and selling them to a publisher to repurchase the horse. She appeared to have accepted the situation between them but believed that they could live amicably together. She accepted his indifference, his anger, his interference in the small affairs of their life, and was

prepared to perform such duties of a wife as he wished and all those of a mother, solely to be with her children. In October the whole affair came out into the open. In Butler's absence in New York, Fanny found two letters addressed to him and in feminine handwriting, included among his secretary's correspondence. From what the letters told she had reason to believe that he had been unfaithful to her six years before—at the time when she was bearing their second daughter.

If Butler's previous actions had been peculiar, his attitude over the two letters was extraordinary. He did not deny having received the letters, but stated that he had never opened them. Beyond this he refused any explanation. He then attacked her, saying that she had no right to break the seals of letters addressed to him and no right to search through his correspondence. *His* correspondence, not his secretary's. All this was set out in his *Statement*.

This was very strange. Butler adopted a didactic, authoritarian pose, refused explanation or to alter one word of a carefully reasoned statement prepared under the supervision of his legal advisers. It is a characteristic of the weak that once they have adopted a stance they maintain it to the very end, afraid to lose the only strength they know. It is also an admission, the individual attempting to maintain his honesty by making one positive denial and then maintaining complete silence. This may not be true in Butler's instance, but he had only himself to blame if people began to display some suspicion of his attitude to Fanny.

Fanny went to a lawyer. On 27th October, 1843, she informed Butler: 'In consequence of your infidelity towards me, and your ill-treatment of me, I have come to the determination to be separated from you.'

The word she used was 'separated'.

Through the agency of the Sedgwicks an agreement was finally reached. Not without difficulty. Butler refused a formal contract of separation, saying he saw no reason for interference by lawyers. He offered her an annual sum of 2,500 dollars (£575) for her support, saying that as they were living at a lodging house, she should be able to live there on that sum, alone, and would thus have constant meetings with the children. In return he demanded that she should not return to the stage, should not advocate in print the abolition of slavery, and should not publish any writings of which he disapproved. These were severe terms, particularly for a woman of Fanny's temperament. It is to her credit, and an additional proof of her good intention, that she accepted them on Butler's guarantee that her allowance be paid monthly or quarterly through Mr. Sedgwick.

Butler rounded on the Sedgwicks. He accused them of believing his wife's exaggerations about his treatment of her and of assisting her to spread rumours against him, including those of infidelities. Having gained Fanny's acceptance of terms which suggested that she was flinging herself on his mercy, he felt sufficiently emboldened to attack those who might tell her not to accept without a fight.

Unfortunately for the protestation of outraged honour contained in this attitude, in the following April a Mr. James Schott challenged Butler to a duel with revolvers, alleging that Butler had ruined the peace and happiness of his, Schott's, family.

No one challenged Butler to a duel over his share in what happened to his own family's happiness. But a complete stranger walked on to the stage and demanded satisfaction. It was something like *An English Tragedy*.

The duel was farcical. The contestants loosed single shots at each other, both of which went completely wide. The seconds then withdrew the challenger from the contest. Honour was satisfied.

Despite this incident, Butler continued to believe Fanny responsible for all the gossip about him. He went so far as to state that Fanny only accepted the compromise between them until she could find reasons for attempting a divorce on the grounds of infidelity. This is basically untrue. The word Fanny used was 'separation.' He himself had decreed that no lawyer should arrange the separation.

Within a very short time Butler broke the terms of their agreement. A month after the duel with Schott he wearied of living in a boarding-house and took a house, to which he removed both himself and the children, for whose education he had engaged a governess, a Miss Hall. Fanny wrote to him inquiring what new arrangement would operate so that she might see the children. In his reply Butler seized the wholly unfair advantage of dictating new terms. All communication between Fanny and every member of the Sedgwick family was to cease, he said. She must not communicate with them either in writing or by word of mouth. Further, she was not to mention to her other friends any happening at his new home if she were permitted to enter, and she had to stop referring to him 'in terms of reprobation and reproach.' He allowed her two days in which to accept these new terms. The second day ended without producing an acceptance of his demands. Thereupon he stated that she had abandoned her children and deserved no further consideration.

Fanny did not give up without a fight. She took new rooms near the house. Within a fortnight Butler removed the children to Newport, Long Island. When they returned he allowed her to see them, but for less than the seven hours a week she had previously been permitted to spend with them. In December she sought a fresh arrangement. Butler reiterated the demand he had made during the previous spring, emphasizing that she had to sever her friendship with, to quote him, 'those low-bred, vulgar meddlers, the Sedgwicks.' Fanny had no choice. She accepted the terms, terms which, to quote Butler again, were harsh because they were not dictated to a wife or even a friend. Even so, it was not until the following 3rd March, 1845, that Fanny was allowed to enter the house; Butler's excuse was that the house was not ready for her comfort. When she arrived she found that Butler had already started to represent her to the two children as the cause of every inconvenience and disappointment they experienced, and that she was to be allowed no say in either their care or guidance. The month of March passed in an atmosphere of undisguised hostility on Butler's part and in Fanny's attempting to give her daughters some care. Early the following month Butler received a letter from Miss Sedgwick; it contained a letter addressed to Fanny. This letter he passed to her. Presumably he expected her to destroy it unread. Fanny, on the other hand, believed that by giving it to her he had given permission for her to read it. Within a few days she learned otherwise. Butler told her: 'You have lived in this house a little over a month, and you have already violated the principal condition which you bound yourself to observe while living under my roof. I will hold no intercourse with a person so utterly wanting in truth and good faith.' He then accused her of circulating rumours

about his relationship with Miss Hall and demanded that she should either admit or deny the responsibility for the rumours. Fanny wrote a note to Miss Hall, denying having been responsible for the slanders circulating about her. Shrewdly, she told Butler that he had to prove his accusation that it was she who had caused rumours about the governess to circulate. There was no reply to this.

In the summer the two children went away for a holiday. No arrangement was made for Fanny to accompany them. Before they returned Fanny sought an adjustment of her relationship with them so that she might have some say in their guidance. Ten days passed without a reply from Butler.

Fanny made up her mind. She believed her present position could only harm the children and deemed it useless to go on as she had throughout the last two years. She left the house on 10th September, 1845, having given Butler this assurance:

> 'Should you at any time see fit to restore me to my rightful proper position towards my children, be assured that *nothing* will prevent my resuming it.'

On 16th September, having borrowed money, she sailed for England.

(3)

From the very first episode over Fanny's American diary to the last incident concerning the children, it was a sordid, stupid, miserable affair, a denial of the hard-earned dignity of Man.

Butler's actions speak for themselves. He is condemned for much of the estrangement by the very deeds he himself sought so persistently to justify. Fanny was intelligent, an affectionate mother—she had always loved children and adored her own. Butler had attempted consistently to enfold her vastly superior intelligence inside the strait-jacket of his own rigid dogmatism: he achieved only the separation of her from her children. What was worse was his apparent lack of courage; from the beginning he placed all the blame upon her shoulders, labelling himself, even if it were untrue, as one of the miserable breed who must always fight to keep their public reputation unsmirched and must lie, cajole, or try to trick those they select as their adversaries into being publicly disgraced.

Was the initial fault Fanny's? She had been wilful, painfully indiscreet, temperamental, difficult to handle. But her sincerity, the motives for her actions, cannot be in doubt. Neither can it be said that she neglected her home in favour of a career; she gave up her career for what she believed marriage would bring her and it is significant that Butler's accusations against her do not include any mention of her failing in her duties in the home. There were hours when she doubted the rightness of her actions in opposing him, when she was sincerely repentant and searched her own conscience, so that, in those hours, he made the mistake of believing her weak and self-condemned.

Was Butler in love with her? It is doubtful. He had outgrown the time

when he was her admirer; it would seem that he outgrew also the time when he was her lover. 'Submit your will to mine' does not sound like the phraseology of a lover, whose wording would surely be 'restrain your actions to our mutual happiness.' Five years is a long, a very long time, for a man who is in love with his wife, and desires their happiness and that of their children, to act as he had acted. Very long. And it was he who had broken their agreement and forced fresh demands upon her.

Greville described Fanny's marriage as a tragedy without any tragic events. Such a statement is perhaps natural in one who gained part of his understanding of what tragedy looked like from the nineteenth-century dramas. In more accurate mood, the diarist found Butler a weak, dawdling, ignorant, violent-tempered man, as unsuited to Fanny as she to him.

Greville said that she acted like a fool and Butler became a brute. Despite her talents, her fine feelings and noble sentiment, her lively imagination, she lacked tact, judgment and discretion. Aware that Butler had outlived his liking for her, as she had outlived her respect for him, she was afraid separation would prevent her being with her children and in the meantime was forced to witness his ruining himself and the children by the bad management of his affairs. That was Greville's summing-up, the only impartial comment made upon the marriage.

Fanny's theory of marriage, though idyllic in many ways, suggests that had she been given true understanding, allowed time to overcome her temperament, and received the right handling, her marriage would have had a very different ending. Her ideas on the subject are worthy of note. They are contained in a letter written to Harriet in 1837 and are distinguished by a nice philosophy, itself indicative of latent good will and understanding. The passage runs:

> 'A woman should be her husband's best friend, his best and dearest friend, as he should be hers. But friendship is a relation of equality, in which the same perfect respect for each other's liberty is exercised on both sides. That sort of marriage, if it exists at all anywhere, is, I suspect, very uncommon everywhere. Moreover, I am not sure that marriage ever is, or can be, or ought to be, such an equality; for "When two men ride on one horse," you know, etc. In the relation of friendship there is perfect freedom, and an undoubted claim on each side to be neither dependent on, nor controlled by, each other's will. In the relation of marriage, this is impossible. Therefore, certainly, marriage is not friendship. . . . A woman should, I think, love her husband better than anything on earth except her own soul; which, I think, a man should respect above everything else on earth but his own soul. There, my dear, is a very pretty puzzle for you, which a good many people have failed to solve. It is, indeed, a pretty difficult problem. Perhaps you have chosen, if not the wiser and better, at any rate the easier and safer part. . . .'

These words show, if nothing else, that she thought about the relationship inside marriage. Idyllic, but thoughtful. Ambitious, yet philosophic. There is no record of Butler having fretted his head with any thoughts upon the subject at all. He apparently believed that he had been born with the true knowledge

and answer to any such questions: 'The fault has been entirely yours.' He was, in fact, the typical Victorian husband beloved of dramatists of the period.

Fanny's thirty-sixth birthday brought no happiness or reassurance to her. In the nineteenth century an unmarried woman in her middle thirties was already regarded as an old maid. A married woman without a home was a failure. And now Fanny, having cut herself off from Butler without any assurance of gaining anything on which to live, had to think about starting to work again. The only person who seems to have viewed the prospect with any degree of confidence was her father. Charles, so unlike the popular concept of a Victorian father, was already busy with plans for their joint return to the stage.

CHAPTER VIII

(1)

A NUMBER of changes had occurred in the English theatre in the thirteen years Fanny had been away from it.

The most important change had been the most recent. Companies at Covent Garden and Drury Lane could no longer regard themselves as 'His Majesty's Servants.' That imposing and, withal, profitable title had vanished only two years before, in 1843, when Parliament finally passed an Act which ended the patent monopoly of drama. No one appears to have realized the opportunities afforded by this revolution; a sorry lack of imagination continually hindered the hard work done by theatrical managements. Entertainment was still dominated by oddities and freaks. The main theatrical fare was farce. When the Adelphi presented the first dramatized version of Dickens's *Christmas Carol* in 1844, it offered a farce on the same bill, *Anthony and Cleopatra Married and Settled*, which is reported as having had patrons 'rolling in the aisles'. At other times the same theatre beguiled its patrons with Chinese giants and Indian dancers. One of the most popular performers was the legless acrobat who entranced customers by disguising himself as a fly, tying himself to a thread suspended from the ceiling, and buzzing over their heads so realistically that ladies fainted and children lapsed into hysterics. The two former patent theatres were in a bad way by the same year; Drury Lane offered shilling concerts while Covent Garden, after a hectic career, inclined an ear to the storm of operatic passions then bursting round Britain.

This lamentable situation was due in some measure to the prolonged dearth of dramatists capable of doing more than titillate audiences with their wares. Douglas Jerrold appears to have been the only one who would have qualified for the title of dramatist in modern eyes. But he was overshadowed by the more dramatic, more imposing figure of Bulwer-Lytton.

Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton had produced some twelve novels, including *The Last Days of Pompeii* and *Rienzi*, and four plays, by the time Fanny returned in 1845. His plays had been *The Duchess de la Valliere*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Richelieu*, and *Money*, four subjects which laid a strong Gallic siege to the loyal subjects of the young Victoria.

A curious lack of reality unites all four plays.

The Duchess de la Valliere had proved a sorry failure when it was produced in 1836. *The Lady of Lyons* advanced on to the stage three years later, proffering any romanceless bosom which had wandered into the audience a bright feather with which to produce pleasurable shivers of hope. It was written, Bulwer said, with a twofold purpose. First he believed that the higher interests of the drama were concerned in the success or failure of Macready's attempt to make Covent Garden Theatre a paying concern and in this circumstance he felt 'something

of the Brotherhood of Art.' Secondly, he wished to find out whether the gloomy comments made by critics who witnessed his first effort proved that he lacked the makings of a dramatist. The story with which he sought to serve both purposes was aged, filled with improbabilities and simple to the point of stupidity. It tells how a French gardener's handsome and self-educated son impersonates a prince and marries his father's employer's daughter, a haughty lady of the French aristocracy. The wedding ceremony over, he whisks her away to his cottage, only to be stricken with remorse at having thus tricked one so fair and innocent. Filled with contrition, he sets about restoring her to her rightful station in life. The lady is not too happy about this well-intentioned, quixotic sacrifice; a few hours alone in the cottage with her husband have convinced her that she is in love with him and she bids him ignore his other impulse. To make equal sacrifice, she persuades him to join Bonaparte's army in search of a fame and fortune which will help him overcome his sense of inferiority. The gardener's son disappears to the wars, and later returns, rich and a colonel. His reappearance is just in time for he finds his wife, believing him dead, about to marry an old suitor, a match inspired by her selfless devotion to her old, impoverished father. The suitor is foiled within sight of the altar and the gardener's son is rapturously welcomed home, though whether because he is the living embodiment of a local boy who has made good, a rich colonel, alive, or still the gardener's son beneath his new-found success, is not clear. Whatever the reason, love triumphs, honour is appeased and Madame le Jardin settles down to a glowing, virile domesticity.

The critics who had criticized *The Duchess de la Valliere* were presumably wrong. *The Lady of Lyons* proved very popular. 'The Brotherhood of Art' was acclaimed a true purpose.

Richelieu, Bulwer's third play, offered a different aspect of Gallic life, but condescended to include an atmosphere of romance. It told how two young lovers, thwarted and hounded, aid the Cardinal and their country, "France, I love thee—Richelieu and France are one!" saving the first from assassination and the second from difficulty by an alliance with Spain.

Any dramatic offering with the bald title of *Money* was not uncalculated to attract citizens of an age when it was to be found in almost any direction except theatre management. Busmen's holidays always afford the true artist a hope of combining pleasure with business. It is doubtful, however, whether the merchants who witnessed the piece when it was produced in 1840 found their hope gratified. *Money* tells how Alfred, a poor secretary, loves and is loved by Clara, a girl as poor as himself. Alfred inherits a fortune, whereupon he is strangely and unsensibly rejected by Clara. Piqued beyond sanity, Alfred starts running after the flashy, attractive Georgina, a girl whom he does not love. To test Georgina's love, Alfred lets it be understood that he has been ruined through the combined fatalities of a bank failure and gambling. When the news reaches Georgina's ears, she deserts him. Her desertion is not caused, as might have been expected, through either his bad business sense or his habit of gambling, failings which might have made life difficult for them and any family lurking beneath their Victorian gooseberry bushes, but solely because he is poor. Bulwer's odd reasoning in this situation is followed by another quixotry, for Clara, still poor, still loving, rushes to Alfred's aid with £10 and later agrees to marry him. This

farrago enjoyed considerable popularity when it first reached the stage; some critics regarded it as Bulwer's best play.

Bulwer offered no explanation as to why he wrote these last two offerings.

With the exception of *Money*, all were produced at Covent Garden.

Though Jerrold lacked everything that made Bulwer a success, his craftsmanship as a dramatist was better and his plays, though comedies, had a ring of reality in them. This is due in some measure to his life. As a youth he had served as midshipman against Napoleon and later took up a journalistic career. His best-known literary efforts were *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures*, published in *Punch*. His first play was a comedy, *More Frightened than Hurt*. His second play, *Black-ey'd Susan*, a melodrama concerned with marriage between a man and woman of widely divergent mentalities. Then followed *The Bride of Ludgate* and *The Prisoner of War*, the latter set in France after the Treaty of Amiens. *Black-ey'd Susan* was produced at Covent Garden in 1837, after its first success at the Surrey Theatre in 1829.

There was nothing amongst these new plays to attract Fanny's interest. Jerrold's plays might have interested her, but they afforded no material for her particular artistry. They were essentially comedies and she was a dramatic actress. What she thought of Bulwer's plays was not sufficient to tempt her to get him to write one for her. She was older now, less inclined to be told in what plays she should appear; maturity lent weight to discrimination.

There was always the possibility of her returning to Covent Garden. Her father still retained his interest in the property. Given suitable material she might even have stomached her dislike for the theatre, but its record since she had first gone to America had only increased her dislike.

That record was typical of the plight of British drama through those same thirteen years.

(2)

When Charles Kemble left the management of Covent Garden Theatre in 1832, his place had been taken by Laporte, formerly connected with the King's Theatre (later to become His Majesty's). Laporte was ambitious, hard-working, and unsuccessful. Before his first season at Covent Garden opened he presented a number of French plays, brought over the French actress, Mademoiselle Mars and the *danseuse* Taglioni, one of the greatest dancers the world has known, and narrowly missed an opportunity of first presenting Paganini to London; Paganini went instead to the King's and only appeared at Covent Garden for a fortnight of farewell performances. Douglas Jerrold's 'Poor Nelly' appeared from behind the curtain at the beginning of 1833, while Fanny was still drawing the crowds in Philadelphia. A few weeks later Charles Kean, Edmund's son, made his appearance at the theatre, and, shortly afterwards, a mammoth costume spectacle announced that the *Israelites in Egypt* had detoured to Covent Garden, complete with choruses from Handel's *Israel in Egypt* and a smattering of music from Rossini's *Mosë*. This virtually completed Laporte's tenure of office. At the end of the season he returned to the King's Theatre, sadly out of pocket.

Alfred Bunn was the next to attempt to cajole the theatre's jinx into better humour. Bunn was to prove the most persistent of Covent Garden managers. This one-time manager of the Theatre Royal in Birmingham had already managed Drury Lane and his initial attempt at Covent Garden was marked by a more lavish expenditure than ever before. Bunn tried very hard. Not only did he tuck Covent Garden into one hand but he contrived to grasp Drury Lane with the other, combining the rivals in one management for the first time in history. He chose the occasion to issue a manifesto, in which the principal reference to Covent Garden was that it had been in a bad way; 'during the whole of the previous ten years' management, it has had but one profitable season', that of Fanny's début. Bunn's first enemy was none other than Bulwer-Lytton, who arrived not to keep the theatre open with his plays but, in Bunn's eyes, to try to close it. Bulwer was a Member of the House of Commons and in July 1833 he introduced an Act to try to take away the patent theatres' privileges.

An atmosphere of gay, inconsequential insanity marks this period of the English theatre.

Bunn raced around preparing his defences to meet the onslaught. He petitioned the Throne. He petitioned the House of Lords. And he won the day. Bulwer's act was cast out. Though the battle was still to be lost, this encounter had ended in victory. Later in the season the House of Lords gained its payment for assistance; the season opened with the spectacle *Pizarro* and later came another spectacle, *Gustavus The Third*, which concluded with a masked ball that proved so popular with the patrons that they 'walked on' and Bunn, in his memoirs *The Stage*, reported he had 'seen on the stage during the masquerade between thirty and forty peers of an evening.'

A benefit performance for George Bartley, the stage-manager for many years, provided the outstanding night of the following season. It included the final scene from the 'Grand Italian Opera *Anna Bolena*, with the chorus of the Italian Opera House'; the 'favourite new comedy' *The Wedding Gown!*; a ballad entitled *Woman*, composed in 1650; the farce *My Neighbour's Wife;* and the *Sylphide* ballet, danced by Taglioni and Guerinot.

That was also the year when Charles returned from America, alone. He brought back a decidedly useful sum of money, but was probably extremely worried as to whether it would be commandeered by his creditors and what the future would be. The suggestions which had been made to him by letter, while in the States, did not materialize into any positive or reliable plans. Bunn came forward with a suggestion. He offered Charles £10 a night for performing at Covent Garden. Charles refused; he was used to earning £30 a night, had some money available and knew, as every actor knows, that once it is rumoured that they have accepted a lower salary than before, they are walking out through the exit of every theatre worth playing in. Charles did not, because he could not, allow such a fate to engulf him. In a second letter Bunn expressed his hope that Charles 'would not oppose his tenant by playing in any other London theatre.' From Bunn's point of view such a request was reasonable enough; from Charles's viewpoint it was far from reasonable. The money he had on hand would not last indefinitely, the rent paid by Bunn on Covent Garden went largely to creditors of earlier years, Fanny was no longer on hand to draw patronage to the

Kemble fortunes, and he was an ageing man. Whatever his feelings towards Bunn and the theatre, he had no alternative. Consequently, the following June he appeared at the Haymarket Theatre.

The following season found Bunn struggling vainly against a tide of disaster whose current increased from day to day. At the commencement an attempt was made to entice a larger audience by lowering the cost of the seats, a move initiated by Captain Polhill, Bunn's backer. Stalls were cut down to 7s., upper circle seats to 5s. and 3s., galleries to 2s., 1s. and 6d. The system lasted only a short time. Polhill confessed to a friend that he had lost over £50,000 in a four-year connection with Drury Lane and that all his attempts had failed. He withdrew from the venture, a sadder and poorer man. Bunn attempted to interest Sir Robert Peel, recently returned from Rome at the fall of the Melbourne government to become Prime Minister, to subsidize the patent theatres. The attempt failed. Alone, Bunn tried desperately to manage and control both theatres; expenses were cut to the bone, the *corps de ballet* was to be seen scampering from one theatre to another, dressing and undressing as often as eight times a night in order to perform four times at each theatre.

When the following season arrived Bunn was a beaten man. Rental of the two theatres was a ruinous burden; the proprietors cannot be blamed for they, in their turn, were being dunned by their creditors. The two rentals amounted to £16,865 a year with an additional £2,000 in taxes; in two years Bunn had paid £17,370 for rent and £2,000 for taxes on Covent Garden alone. Bunn refused to admit defeat. He appears to be one of those magnificent, fortunate individuals who are for ever convinced of a miracle lurking conveniently round the very next corner and never being disappointed at the blessing's habit of playing hide-and-seek upon every latest occasion. He worked out a scheme and asked the proprietors of the theatres to accept a reduced rental each of £1,500. What he hoped to obtain by saving only £3,000 a year, only Bunn could have known; it was a mere drip compared to the total and would have availed him little. Drury Lane accepted the proposal. Covent Garden did not. Bunn withdrew from the latter, the theatre was advertised to be let, and in walked Messrs. Fitzball and Osbaldiston.

Mr. Fitzball was a diligent reader of *The Times* at breakfast. One morning his eye chanced upon the name of Covent Garden in the *To Let* column. He finished his breakfast in thoughtful mood, prepared himself for the street with a worried frown on his forehead, walked out of his house, and rented the theatre. He walked straight past the box-office without noticing the jinx who nodded at him as he passed by. This slight offended the ultimate ruler of the theatre's destinies. He let Mr. Fitzball commit himself, and sat in the box-office, biding his time.

Fitzball's short term of office was dogged with ill-luck. He was already prone to illness. Work and worry at the theatre soon caused his health to give way. A few weeks brought him to the verge of ruin and he was only saved by D. W. Osbaldiston's offering to take first a share in the theatre and later agreeing to back it and retain Fitzball as manager for two years. Their joint partnership opened the doors on 19th October, 1835, with *Hamlet*. Charles played the leading role. A great wave of interest splashed over the theatre and vanished in a thin trickle. Prices were lowered again, and raised immediately when it was noticed that the

trickle was drying out rapidly. A musical burletta based on Bulwer's *Paul Clifford* gained some support, and gave the partners hope. Osbaldiston then suggested using *The Bronze Horse*. It proved a shrewd stroke. Box-office receipts soared again. At the beginning of the new year Miss Faucit made her Covent Garden début, playing Fanny's former role in *The Hunchback* opposite Charles. She was greeted with interest: 'oh, heavens! what a revelation of beauty! . . . walking in brightness . . . the noble figure, the lovely arms, the fluent drapery! Is it Hebe? Is it Aurora? Is it a goddess that moves before us?' It was Miss Faucit, gaining the experience which caused de Quincey's ecstatic confusion. Miss Faucit took over many of Fanny's roles, Belvidera in *Venice Preserved*, Juliet, Mrs. Beverley in *The Gamester*, and was partnered nobly by Charles and Macready.

In the following spring Charles made his official farewell. It was then the custom to have as many 'long and last' farewells as proved profitable. Nobody heeded the leave-taking, least of all the players who, for years afterwards, were to be found saying 'hello' once again on the same boards or in other theatres. Tradition had to be served, however, the occasion of bidding farewell always increased box-office receipts—in case one or other player really intended to quit the profession—and Charles had a good season, playing through his favourite parts, until they ended with the role of Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. The last evening affected everyone. When the curtain descended Charles was in tears, ladies in the audience wept as they realized that with 'the high Roman fashion' there passed also their youth, and members of the company were equally distressed.

The same season ended Osbaldiston's career at the theatre and commenced Macready's tenure of office.

Macready had already been 'startled' to learn that the nightly expenses were £154, but on 29th June, 1837, this great actor, and very vain man, continued discussions on taking over the theatre. He chose the occasion to point out to the proprietors that he had sufficient worries to contemplate without accepting their gratuitous suggestion that he should shoulder part of the risks involved. 'In risking my name, time, peace of mind, salary as performer, balance of loss, and increased expenses,' he told them, 'I do more than enough, and adhere to what I started with, viz., that I will not lay out one shilling nor risk one farthing beyond a night's expenses.' Macready tried to frighten them by posing as a business man. It was a role in which he fancied himself. Like Fanny, he did not care for the theatre and had been heard to say that his purpose in becoming an actor was to make money. Contrary to popular supposition, this base reason does not appear to have had a detrimental effect upon his work. People either liked or disliked him: at the appearance the *News* said he was 'in many points superior to Mr. Kean' though he made his last scene in *The Distressed Mother* 'one continued, incoherent rave'; others claimed he was 'first-rate,' 'second to none,' and 'step by step overcame the reluctant prejudices of the critics.' Macready was a natural egotist, he walked with destiny and the Almighty throughout his career. A few days after the interview in June his diary notes that his health is better; within a fortnight, having been congratulated on having 'undertaken the conduct of the theatre' it had become worse and was affecting his playing; and a fortnight later again that his mind was quite made up to direct the theatre and 'fervently and

with humility (I) invoke the blessing of Almighty God upon my efforts and labours.' So, four days later, he noted, 'Left my blessed home, its quiet and its joys, to enter on a task for which nature and taste have disqualified me.' The blessed home contained his first wife and a numerous family, only two of whom survived.

Macready's troubles started before he took over control. By October he was writing that he had offered the management to pay moneys to the amount of £1,000, 'restore the salary I had received, and work on for the actors and proprietors as long as I can without remuneration.'

Macready's control ended in July 1839, with a performance of *Henry V*. From start to finish it proved a succession of financial worries, salaries forgone, expenses curtailed but still rising, confusion during the Queen's visit in 1837 (the year in which Fanny's mother died), and, a brighter note in an overcast, dusty story, the invention of a new limelight by Frederick Gye. Macready had to leave the theatre while Bunn was doing good business at Drury Lane with Shakespearian productions, acted by Charles Kemble and Miss Faucit.

The actor's successor at Covent Garden was Charles James Mathews, husband of Madame Vestris, the actress, who had presented burlesque extravaganzas at the Olympic Theatre from 1831. She had married Mathews in America in 1838, when she was reported to be already 'in the sere,' with 'a good deal of yellow leaf visible.' They opened at Covent Garden, appropriately enough, with *Love's Labour's Lost* and the shilling gallery shut; in fact, they opened, as John Philip Kemble had opened thirty years before, with a riot. The new management, inspired by memory, soon rectified the error.

The most important presentation of the season was Sheridan Knowles's *The Love Chase*, with Ellen Tree. Miss Tree was already a favourite; 'we think of her as . . . the hoyden softened by the lady,' as Talfourd put it. Her first tragic role had been in Fanny's *Francis I*, and she had once played Romeo to Fanny's Juliet.

As night followed day, so tragedy followed the Mathews. The old story ran its familiar course. Business was poor. Expenses were high. Brokers' men and sheriffs arrived. The Mathews were saved, again appropriately, by a performance of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. This appeasement to the jinx proved a brief turning-point in the Mathews' management. For three successive seasons the theatre prospered. In the third season Adelaide Kemble made her London début in the opera *Norma*, and Fanny, then on her second visit to London, played with her.

It is difficult to credit Fanny's comment of January 1842, that Charles gained no rent from the theatre, that it was empty when Adelaide was not singing, and that the 'whole ruinous concern is propped only by her.' She may have meant that Charles's creditors from earlier years took the majority of money paid him, but the Mathews' paid. They had to. Nevertheless, whatever the reason, at the end of the third season the proprietors seized possession of the property and wardrobe, claiming that arrears of ground rent amounted to £14,000. Mathews' wry comment of this event places responsibility squarely on Charles:

> 'Little did that amiable lady (Adelaide) imagine that her triumph would be my ruin, but so it turned out. The proprietors of Covent Garden, who

had previously been content to be, as it were, sharers in our speculation by making the rent easy for us, now saw that they could do without us. The theatre was well stocked and in perfect order. Miss Kemble's father was one of the proprietors, and under his management, with the brilliant attraction of his talented daughter, they could get on very well without us. The blow was soon announced. The theatre was taken out of our hands, after three years of outlay and labour to establish it; our property was all confiscated to meet the alleged arrears of £14,000, the scenery, wardrobe, and properties we had brought from the Olympic included—and we found ourselves adrift with nothing left but a piece of plate (presented by the company) and the debts of the concern.'

This version does not ring true. It seems unlikely, for instance, that Charles would gamble the whole future of the theatre on one daughter, having gained previous experience that her sister had been unable to rid the theatre of debt. It is surprising too that Mathews did not fight harder if, indeed, the arrears were 'alleged.'

It is true, however, that Charles managed Covent Garden for the rest of that season and for the commencement of the next. But in November, Fanny wrote to Lady Dacre:

'You may see in the papers a statement of the disastrous winding up of the season at Covent Garden, or rather, its still more disastrous abrupt termination. After our protesting and remonstrating with all our might against my father again being involved in that Heaven-forsaken concern, and receiving the most solemn and positive assurances from those who advised him into it for the sake of having his liability whatever should rest upon or be incurred by him, and that if the thing did not turn out prosperously, it should be put an end to, and the theatre closed immediately, they have gone on, in spite of night after night of receipts below the expenses, and now are obliged to shut up shop, my poor father being, as it turns out, personally involved for a considerable sum.'

The next two attempts to manage Covent Garden were made by Henry Wallack, an effort which ended after one month, at the end of 1843, and another attempt by Bunn. If poetic justice were the law of life, Bunn should have succeeded and won great fame and a large fortune at his third attempt. But once again Bunn's labour of love was lost. The attempt was shorter, and equally as calamitous as his previous efforts.

Poetic justice does appear, however, in the next phase of the theatre's history, when it was taken over for a while by the Anti-Corn Law League. This tenancy cast no reflection on the modern plays and ancient melodramas presented under its roof; the purpose was solely to gain publicity for the foremost political agitation of the hour. The League booked the theatre for a fifty-night 'stand' at £60 a night. On the evenings arranged gentlemen arrived to persuade their audience by the magic of their voices alone; they forswore the usual trappings of drama but convinced the audience that the very air was weighty with menace.

Perhaps the jinx, realizing that even actors eat, favoured 'the cheap loaf'. The League's efforts succeeded admirably; in three weeks 125,000 people paid for admission and the League gained £25,000 for its expenses. Among performers who caused this success were many who, had they not been politicians, would have undoubtedly made good actors: Richard Cobden, John Bright, W. J. Fox, and Daniel O'Connell, to name only a few. At one performance O'Connell became so overwrought with his oratory that he took off his wig, put it in his hat, and flapped a large crimson bandanna handkerchief over his perspiring bald brow.

A Mr. Laurant appears as manager for a short time in February 1845. He opened with *Henry IV*, in which the role of Hotspur was taken by a 'Mr. Betty,' either the 'Infant Roscius' indulging a mature passion or, presuming that infant prodigies run in families, his son, or, maybe, grandson.

A performance of Sophocles' *Antigone*, translated from the German and with music by Mendelssohn, provided the next major dramatic offering. Why Mendelssohn should have found the event 'startling' has never been explained, unless it was the proximity of a relation of Œdipus to Queen Victoria, in a London strident with Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations and John Wesley's disciples calling from near-by chapels.

Some weeks later the Anti-Corn Law League staged a revival, when it held a large and very grand bazaar to realize money for its funds. That tenancy alone appears to have been crowned with success: the following year the League gained its objective.

Throughout the following two years the theatre dawdled along, its prestige lower than at any time in its history, its affairs as involved as ever, its future overshadowed. Then, on Tuesday, 6th April, 1847, a new lease of life started when the neighbourhood resounded to a sudden burst of music and Covent Garden Theatre, disguised in imposing moustachios, a southern complexion, and the name of the Royal Italian Opera House, started its operatic career with Rossini's *Semiramide*. Before the season ended the royal Italian infant had sung lustily through Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algieri*, *Il Barbiere di Sevilla*, *La Gazza Ladra*, *La Donna del Lago;* Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Elisir d'Amore*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Anna Bolena*, *Maria di Rohan;* Verdi's *Ernani* and *Due Foscari;* Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Nozze di Figaro;* Bellini's *Norma*, *Puritani*, and *Sonnambula*. Audiences left the theatre, their ears still echoing to the music, their senses flooded with southern fire and passion, to encounter in the streets outside men carrying pole-hung banners which read *Beware! Bad Houses!* not, however, minions of the jinx, but local churchwardens warning of perils in establishments near by which catered for passions stirred by the flooding southern music.

When Fanny arrived in England faced with a necessity of making a fresh career the affairs of Covent Garden proffered no inducement to her to abandon her earlier dislike of 'that Heaven-forsaken concern.' Nothing which had happened in its past was calculated to warm her heart to it. Nothing which was to happen in the following two years caused any alteration in her attitude. In her eyes, the sorry pile was shrouded in the tattered cobwebs of misery. She had finished with it.

(3)

Other forms of distraction enjoyed a roaring trade through those years. The music-halls were firmly established. They had sprung up all over the country; in London the number was fast approaching the twenty-seven halls it would have reached in another three years. They arrived bringing with them a strange mixture of names. There were Coal Holes, Cider Cellars, Grecian Saloons, Moguls, and, in the provinces, Steam Clocks, Constellations, Wire Trellises, and one known as the Mumps.

To these halls gentlemen repaired nightly in hundreds, sitting at tables arranged up and down the pit, quaffing their beer and champagne, supping off a steak or half a dozen chops in coffee-rooms attached to the hall. Aproned waiters darted between the tables. Bells rang. Glasses clinked. A babble of talk beat through the cigar-smoke. On the stage young ladies clad in flowing white gowns resembling nightdresses sat strumming vast golden harps while they sang the latest and saddest ballads. Sometimes the young ladies, or the male turns, were unpopular. When they were, old boots, occasional stray cats, usually dead, and bottles of varying size and uniform emptiness, were thrown at them. The 'Lord Chief Baron' Nicholson held mock trials at his Coal Hole Tavern, off the Strand, which proved very popular with the younger men by dint of Nicholson's bawdy innuendo in the 'trials,' the *Poses Plastiques* of naked young women poised in pale frozen simperings against black velvet curtains, and beds at 1s. 6d. Nicholson was, in many ways, an exception; he was out to make money and he dirtied everything he touched in order to get it. But in other halls . . . there was a difference. Here, amid beer and champagne, tall hats and an occasional demure bonnet, honest hearts gave vent to rousing choruses, showing (as Mr. Willson Disher says in *Winkles and Champagne*) that:

Golden lads and girls all must
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Here was the English birthplace for such later imposing trends of artistic conscience as the Pre-Raphaelites and the Æsthetes. If godliness were an impossibility, if industrialization denied cleanliness, if chapel fervour denied dignity, at least there was room for philosophy. Top-hatted gentlemen quaffed another mug of ale and chorused sadly of life's illusions.

There was no niche for Fanny in such a setting.

(4)

When Fanny returned to London she joined her father at Mortimer Street, Cavendish Square. Charles had been a widower for some time, his health was not consistently good, and he had decided to abandon the theatre in favour of giving Shakespearian readings. Fanny's arrival made him reconsider his future and he immediately busied himself with plans for resuming their stage career together, with an initial tour of America. Adelaide could not be called in; she had retired from the theatre two years before to marry Edward John Sartoris, a

wealthy Italian, and was living in Rome. Charles got so far as to make preparations for Fanny and himself to sail from Liverpool in November. But the plan fell through, fortunately perhaps. Trouble was brewing in Oregon, Fanny told him; later reports gave proof of a development in the situation. The project was abandoned. Charles remained in London, while Fanny set off, by way of Havre, Rouen, Paris, Orleans, Chalon-sur-Saone, Lyons, and Marseilles, to join Adelaide in Rome for a holiday.

She spent almost a year in Italy, regaining her strength and interest in life, blunting the sharpest edges of unhappiness. She walked and talked, noted and wrote. Her observations of Italian life, the content of her writing, display a deeper philosophy than before. Her writing reveals also a far more extensive knowledge of history than she ever laid claim to. But it is in the development of her philosophy that the greatest change can be noted. One phrase in particular sets it positively:

> 'The priest-ridden ignorance and superstition, the laziness, the imbecility of the present (Italian) government, are like dung spread over the soil; seeds ferment below that shall again cover these glorious countries with the noblest harvests of humanity; for in the moral, as in the physical, world, corruption is the cause of re-regeneration, just as, unfortunate, in civilization, ripeness has hitherto preceded rottenness by but a little space.'

Such a thought from a woman in an age when women were commonly held to have no brains or wisdom, written when she was thirty-six, when most women have other thoughts busying their minds, and while she was bitterly unhappy and unsure of her future, is no small achievement. *A Year of Consolation*, in which the foregoing appears, shows that Fanny's years of married life had benefited her understanding, whatever misery they had caused her heart. Such understanding is seldom apparent in the work of those who succeed in skimming the surface of life without experiencing hardship and heartbreak. The whole work is illuminated by passages which reveal that Fanny's perception had finally bridged the gulf between inexperienced intention and mature achievement. One reader has gone on record saying that the most important part of *A Year of Consolation* is that where she describes her residence among the Frascati peasantry. This is surely wrong. It is in her understanding and maturity that the book has its interest, making it a good work, outweighing the habitual carelessness in writing and over-frankness in personal statement.

Upon her return from Italy she set about preparing to return to the stage. The rest of the winter of 1846-47 was a busy time for her. On 16th February, 1847, she made her second début, appearing as Julia at the Theatre Royal in Manchester.

CHAPTER IX

(1)

FANNY left London a few days before the opening night in Manchester, after (as she told Harriet) 'a terrible day of fatigue and worry, breaking my back with packing my things, and my heart with paying my bills.' Two days later she settled in the Albion Hotel, the first of the many she was to stay at during the next years. She found time to tell Harriet that she disliked writing letters, a curious statement to be made by one who had written letters regularly almost every week, sometimes more often, for over sixteen years and was to continue writing them for another twenty years. Though she was not looking forward to her return to the stage it did not cause her the dread she had experienced before her début at Covent Garden:

> 'I am not very nervous about my *plunge*. The only thing that I dread is the noise (noise of any sort being what my nerves can no longer endure at all) and which I am afraid may greet me. I wish I could avoid my "reception" as it is called, because any loud sound shakes me now from head to foot; this is the one thing that I do dread—I have gained from self-possession and strength in these past years, and I hope my acting itself, as well as my comfort in acting, may benefit by my increased self-command. Poor Hayes (Fanny's maid) says that the peace of being alone with me, after our late lodging, is like having left *Hell;* we shall see what she says to-morrow night at the theatre—poor thing.'

Fanny found that the system of working in the provincial theatres had changed during her absence. Plays were changed every few nights, in some cases every night. Visiting players acted with a resident company—the system still obtaining with repertory companies. Those like herself were engaged for appearances in one or more plays for a number of nights, not, as would be the practice later, for a week or fortnight season in one play. Theatre architecture was changing; the attempt was being made to draw a sharper distinction between the large music-halls and the more pretentious opera-houses, and the tendency was to create a quieter, more intimate atmosphere in the theatres. Other changes were arriving. Lighting arrangements had improved; scenery and properties were beginning to aim at creating an illusion of reality. The players themselves were undergoing changes before they appeared on the boards. Henry Greville complained to Fanny of her appearance; he was 'full of strictures upon my carriage and deportment on the stage, and earnestly entreated me to suffer his coiffeur ("a clean, tidy foreigner"), to whitewash me after the approved French manner, i.e., to anoint my skin with cold cream and then cover it with pearl powder; and this, not only to my face, but my arms, neck, and shoulders. Don't you see me undergoing such a process and submitting to such "manipulation"?

The first night proved to be much as she had anticipated. She described the event, the thoughts it produced in her mind, to Harriet:

'The people that I have to deal with here, seem to me very much like all other people everywhere else. The proprietor and manager of the theatre is an active, enterprising, intelligent man, who knows the value of liberality and that generosity is sometimes the most remunerative as well as amiable and popular line of action. He is a shrewd man of business, a little rough in his manner, but kindly and good-natured withal, and extremely civil and considerate to me. He is anxious that I should renew my engagement, and I shall be very willing to do so on my return from Dublin.

'My stage manager is a brother of James Wallack, well-bred and pleasant to deal with, and also very kind and courteous to me. Everybody in the theatre is civil and good to me and I am heartily grateful to them all. . . .' (James Wallack was the actor who had made Fanny cry when she witnessed his performance in *The Rent Day*, in New York, a few days before her own début there. He modelled his performances upon those of Fanny's father so successfully that Talfourd said that had Charles not been seen 'we should have been exceedingly struck by Wallack's gestures and attitudes.')

'My dressing-room at the theatre is wretched in point of size and situation, being not much larger than this sheet of paper, and up a sort of steep ladder staircase. In other respects, it is tidy enough, and infinitely better than the dark barrack-room you remember me dressing in when I was in Manchester years ago, when I was a girl—alas!—I don't mean a pun! It is not the same theatre but a new one, built by the Mr. Knowles who engaged me to act here, and one of the prettiest, brightest, and most elegant playhouses I ever saw; admirable for the voice, and of a most judicious size and shape. Unfortunately, a large hotel has been built immediately adjoining it (I suspect by the same person, who is a great speculator and apt, I should think, to have many, if not too many, irons in the fire), and the space that should have been appropriated to the accommodation of the actors, behind the scenes in the theatre, has been sacrificed to the adjoining building, which is a pity.

'If I were to tell you the names of the people who act with me, you would be none the wiser. The company is a very fair one indeed, and might be an excellent one, if they were not all too great geniuses either to learn or rehearse their parts. The French do not put the flimsiest vaudeville upon the stage without rehearsing it for *three months;* here, however, and everywhere else in England, people play such parts as *Macbeth* with no more than three rehearsals; and I am going to act this evening in *The Honeymoon*, with a gentleman who, filling the principle part of the piece, has not thought fit to attend at the rehearsal; so that though I was there, I may say that I have had no rehearsal of it—which is businesslike and pleasant.

'Oh, my dear Hal, I strive to judge my position as reasonably as I can! I do hope that in spite of the loss of youth, of person, and feeling (which latter communicates itself even to acting), I may be able to fill some parts better than I did formerly. I have no longer any nervousness to contend with—only a

sense of the duty I owe to my employers and spectators, to take the utmost pains, and do my work as well as I possibly can for them.

'My physical power of voice and delivery is not diminished, which is good for tragedy. My self-possession is increased, which ought to be good for comedy; and I do trust I may succeed at least sufficiently to be able, by going from one place to another, and returning to America when I have worn out my public favour here—say, in two years—to make what will enable me to live independently, though probably upon very small means.'

To this letter she added:

'I write this after my first night's performance, and I trust my views are not unreasonable. How I wondered at myself as I stood at the side scene the other night, without any quickening of the pulse or beating of the heart—thanks to the other experiences I have gone through which have left me small sensibility for stage apprehensions; and yet I could hardly have believed it possible that I should have been as little nervous as I was. When I went on, however, I had to encounter the only thing I had dreaded. The loud burst of public welcome (suggestive of how many associations, and what a contrast!) shocked me from head to foot and tried my nerves to a degree that affected my performance unfavourably through several scenes.

'But this was my first appearance after thirteen years of absence from the stage; and, of course, no second emotion of the kind awaits me. The exertion and exposure of the performance gave me a violent cold and sore throat, and I have been obliged to send for a doctor. I had two rehearsals yesterday, which did not mend matters, but I have bolstered myself up *pro tem.* and what with inhaling hot water and swathing my throat in cold, and lozenges and gargles, etc., I hope to fight through without breaking down.'

The contrast between her mind at this time and when she had first gone on the stage, as shown by these letters to the same friend, is too marked to escape attention. Before she may have had a feeling of gratitude to the audience, but now she experienced it as a reason for improving her work. Now, too, her mind was never far from worry, greater worry than before, but she was determined to give better performances. And whereas before she had enjoyed thoughtless good health, now she was obviously run down, suffering from nervous worry and physically below the level of health necessary to make her best effort.

There were the other psychological differences. None is harder in their attitude to life than the frustrated or defeated idealist. Fanny had become hard; perhaps it was this quality which gave her the final energy necessary for her second appearance on the stage. In her generation's reckoning, thirty-odd was a greater age than it is counted as being to-day. Her youth had gone and she was now neither slim nor as attractive as formerly. She was, indeed, portly and lacking what had formerly been hers in the way of good looks. Only her eyes remained unchanged, dark, finely shaped, and as quick as ever. Unhappiness had bred in her an understanding she had lacked. With it had come the 'loss of feeling' and a sharper business sense. The latter was inescapable. Alone, with neither

Charles nor Dall, her faithful companions of earlier years, to attend to her commercial success and personal comfort, she had to fight every battle for herself. She won. The manager of the theatre may indeed have known 'the value of liberality,' but he had to apologize to his patrons for it. Fanny demanded, and got, £500 for the six nights in which she played at his theatre, which had to raise its prices in order to meet the demand. A few years before she would have lacked the inner will even to start making her demand, let alone to attain it. But she knew that she possessed advantages: the stage lacked an actress of experience, with a great theatrical name to attract attention from the public, a name which she had enhanced, who had style, good elocution, wide learning, knowledge; and Fanny capitalized on these qualities. She was fighting now for her future independence and she had to fight hard if she was to succeed.

Unhappiness frequently afflicts the individual concerned with worries over their health; Fanny was no exception. Her next few letters to Harriet (whom she had been addressing as 'Hal' for some time past) are full of frets over minor physical worries, the very upsets which no woman heeds if she is content with life. Fanny complains of 'swollen feet,' ankles that make standing on the stage for five minutes 'a terrible ordeal,' continual tiredness and 'pertinacious' coughs, 'a tremendous cold in the head,' and, inevitably, the ominous words of the unhappy in heart: 'My time, thank God, is so incessantly occupied with all kinds of business—writing letters to managers, acquaintances, and friends, rehearsing, acting, looking after my dresses, correcting proof-sheets, and receiving visits—that I have no leisure but what I spend in sleep.'

The last night of the opening season in Manchester tired her considerably. Applause continued long after the final curtain had descended. Fanny found the demonstration too overpowering. 'I turned quite faint and all but fell down on the stage,' she told Lady Dacre, 'but I am not a fainting woman and so only went into violent hysterics as soon as I was carried to my dressing-room. So much for that "pride" which you speak of as likely to prevent my shedding tears when encountering the kind acclamations of a multitude of my "fellow-creatures".'

This phrasing is peculiarly Fanny's own, the semi-satirical, semi-whimsical cloaking of a personal event or opinion, the under-statement made over-important by too careful emphasis. On the face of it, it is doubtful whether applause or warmth of feeling produced her hysterics. Perhaps it was the noise. It might have been due to something else. Individuals who receive kindness at the hands of strangers, and can remember chiefly lack of understanding from those supposed to be nearer and attuned to their moods, are apt to become distraught when the comparison is sharpest upon their consciousness. Fanny may have become suddenly aware of the difference between the warmth and kindliness shown her by this Lancashire audience, who knew her only as an actress, and the atmosphere which had marked the last five years of her married life. Perhaps she recalled at that moment having told Harriet that she doubted whether she would make a good wife and should have stayed upon the stage, among these kindly people. Perhaps she was aware that the crowd would always be nearer to her than any individual who shared her life. Perhaps. Such a moment may have come to her then; it is a possibility.

The moment passed. Fanny went on to Birmingham. Here again she played to crowded houses. Here also the management had to charge double prices in order to pay her salary.

Her next appearance was at the Theatre Royal, Liverpool. The *Theatrical Times* noted that her acting and declamation in the roles she played at this theatre were of a high order. One of the plays was *The School for Scandal*. Talking to a member of the company during the third act she almost forgot her entrance and rushed on the stage only just in time, humming not the tune Lady Teazle was commonly supposed to hum but the favourite negro tune of the day:

> Oh! Hi! Ho! the boatmen row
> Going down the Ohio.

From Liverpool she addressed two letters to Harriet. The first contained this item of mature observation:

> 'I am perfectly persuaded that, as a considerable amount of food goes into one's stomach, the use of which is merely to produce the necessary distension of the organs, channels, receptacles, machinery, etc., in short; so a considerable amount of words proceeds out of our mouths, the use of which is merely to keep our lungs aired and our speaking organs in exercise. For that purpose, the follies, and foibles, and even faults, of our friends, are excellent material, provided no bitterness mixes in the process. . . .'

The second letter contains opinions which reveal better than almost any other the originality of her thought in an age which was fast becoming stodgy through lack of imagination in any other than purely mechanical ingenuity. Characteristically, they are short, without any attempt at development, and as carelessly written as the overwhelming bulk of her writing.

> 'Unless death produces in us an immediate accession of goodness,' she wrote, 'I cannot conceive that it should produce greater nearness to God. Place, time, life, death, earth, Heaven, are divisions and distinctions that we make, like the imaginary lines we trace upon the surface of the globe. But goodness, surely, is nearness to God, and *only* goodness. Though I suppose those good servants of His who have striven to do His will while in this life are positively nearer to Him after death, I think it is because, in laying down the sins of infirmity that inevitably lodge in their mortal bodies, they really are thus much better after death. I do not think this is the case with those who have not striven after excellence, which a young child can hardly be supposed to have done. . . .'

The letter concludes with a typical conclusion, a mixture of thought, emotion, ideas, observation, and the distillation of a drip of philosophy from the compounded elements:

> 'I have been walking to-day and yesterday in the Botanical Garden here. . . .

The place is full of the saddest and tenderest recollections to me. It is full, too, of innumerable witnesses of God's mercy and wisdom; plants and flowers from every climate, and the annual resurrection of the earth is already begun among them. I am very unwell to-day, but I was well yesterday. This seems to be now the sort of life-tenure I may expect. So be it.'

From Liverpool she crossed the Irish Channel to act at the Theatre Royal in Dublin. In a letter to Harriet, replying to a point in connection with uncertainty, and whether it bothered her, she answered frankly: '"The woman who deliberates," says the saying, "is lost." My loss has been, and ever will be, through precipitation, not deliberation.' She also notes that the hotel at which she was staying was better than most, 'the rooms are clean, comfortable, and cheerful, but the fare is bad and far from abundant, but if the charges are meagre in proportion I shall be satisfied, if not with food, at least with equity.' She had sufficient courage to be an optimist about the smaller inconveniences and injustices of life.

While in Ireland she visited Harriet for a few days before returning to England, and Birmingham, for a second appearance at the theatre there. Her new experiences travelling by train in her own country led her to observe some differences between the conduct of the sexes. On arriving in Birmingham again she told Harriet 'women are always said to talk more than men, and yet I have generally observed that when Englishwomen who are strangers to each other travel together, not a single word is exchanged between them, while men almost invariably fall into discourse together . . . the fact is that most women's subjects of interest are so purely personal and individual that they can only be talked over with intimates.'

The iron way had spread and was still spreading all over the British Isles. The old days of travelling by coach had vanished. In many ways it was best for her that they had, for it is doubtful whether she could have faced the earlier tedium alone. The railroad was still a novelty, a toy, and there was a pleasant, warming humanity to be encountered along the road. From Bristol, her next port of call, she told Harriet that 'the stokers on all the engines that I saw or met this morning had adorned their huge iron dragons with great bunches of hawthorn and laburnum, which hung their poor blossoms close to the hissing hot breath of the boilers and looked wretched enough. But this dressing up the engines, as formerly the stage-coach used to be decked with bunches of flowers at their ears on May Day, was touching. I suppose the railroad men get fond of their particular engine, though they can't pat and stroke it, as sailors do their ship. Speculate upon that form of human love. I take it there is nothing which, being the object of a man's occupation, may not be made also that of his affection, pride, and solicitude, too. Were we—people in general, I mean—Christians, forms of government would be of quite secondary importance, in fact, of mere expediency. . . .' It is a pity that this human touch has vanished since the days she witnessed it; a bedraggled bunch of hawthorn would lend some cheer to the necessity for travelling through the wrong areas for travel.

Bristol was not so advantageous as the earlier cities. For the first night Fanny's share of the box-office receipts amounted to only £14.

It was from this city that evidence is found proving how unhappy she was without her children. She spent a few days at Bristol, went to Bath for another few days, and returned to Bristol again. From both places comes knowledge that she was attempting to appease her desire to see her own daughters by watching those of other women. One day in Bristol she was sitting in her dressing-room, preparing for the evening's performance, when some 'poor little ragged urchins' climbed a railing separating the theatre from the street behind it and came to 'cluster and hang like a swarm of begrimed bees' at the dressing-room window to watch her preparations. Bridget, Fanny's maid, turned the theatrical dresses round on their hangers so that the children might see them.

> 'We could hear all that they said . . . how they wondered if I put *them* beautiful dresses on one by one, or over each other; the rose in my hair, which you gave me, and the roses in my shoes, made them scream with delight; and if you could have heard the pathetic earnestness with which one of them exclaimed: "Oh, my, don't you wish *them 'ere windies was cleaner!*" for the dirt-dimmed glass obstructed the full glory of the vision not a little. Poor little creatures! my heart ached with compassion for them and their hard conditions, while they hung and clung in ecstatic amazement at my frippery.'

From Bath she noted that the house at which she was staying had lovely gardens and was 'full of lovely children, who are a perpetual delight to me.' On her return to Bristol, referring to Bath again, she said that she had spent 'a delightful hour with three charming little creatures, children of my host for whom I (bought) toys, and who (amused) themselves with them and allowed me a time of enchanting participation.'

From the West Country she returned to London for a short stay and then resumed the road. In June she wrote to Harriet from Plymouth, giving some idea of what the next few weeks would be like:

> 'I shall act here on Friday, and leave for Exeter on Saturday. I shall act there one or two nights, but I do not yet know precisely how often. I expect to be in London by the end of next week, remain there for a week, after which I shall probably go for some nights to Southampton, so that, in a sort of way, I shall see Emily, and she will see me. Further than that I have not at present decided. I have yet to visit the Midland Counties, where I have had engagements offered me, and York, Sheffield, and Leeds; after which I shall probably go on to Scotland. But all this is at present without fixed date. . . .
>
> 'These are my floating plans for the summer. Of course you will hear into what specific arrangements they consolidate themselves by degrees.
>
> '*All* the theatres where I act—indeed, as far as I can see, all the theatres throughout the country—are Theatres Royal; and with very good reason, for they are certainly all equally patronized by royalty.'

The same letter contains a comment upon herself which it is surprising she had

not made before. To a woman of her character, such a thing is far from unusual:

> '. . . you cannot imagine, and I cannot say, how I shrink from demonstrating a great deal of the affection that I feel. There are no words or signs adequate to it that I should not be reluctant to use, and I think this is at variance with the unhesitating and vehement expression of thought and opinion, and mere impression that is natural to me. But we are all more or less compounded of contradictions, and I *more* than *less*.'

The realization appears to have remained in her mind, for in a letter from Exeter a few days later, she writes 'I desire a certain frame of mind that my conduct may flow habitually from it, without constant reference to outward coherency.' She goes on to say that 'people are generally too afraid of appearing inconsistent, too desirous to seem reasonable—in short, more anxious upon the whole about what they *do* than what they *are*.'

It is necessary here to go back a few weeks to her appearance in London. The engagement had a significant effect upon her career. She had appeared at the Princess's Theatre at the end of April under Sheridan's management. Another manager had tried to engage her, a busy, trying, untiring man; in a word: Bunn. Bunn endeavoured to persuade Fanny to appear at Drury Lane but failed, he said, because of the exorbitant terms she demanded. Her arrival at the Princess's was marked with success. Her first play was *The Hunchback*. Later she appeared in *The Gamester*, Knowles's *Wife*, and *The Stranger*. Critics noted a lack of spontaneity but greater subtlety than in her previous performances, thirteen years before. One wrote that her Juliet showed something of her aunt Siddons's feeling in the dramatic scenes. In two successive issues the critics for the *Theatrical Times*, in May, said that even if she were not the greatest actress on the English stage, she was second to none, and her forte was tragedy. In the third week the same critic noted that she erred by making her strongest appeal to the intellect, to awakening imagination; if she were less fastidious in the taste which marked her acting she would be loved more though she might be admired less. But though critics and habitual theatre-goers found her work improved, the public generally paid her scant attention. A new generation was growing up, a generation to whom the name of Kemble meant little, except a reminiscence on parental lips. Gentlemen preferred the music-hall, their wives followed the fortunes of such foreign importees as Jenny Lind and Madame Rachel.

Mention of Miss Lind takes the account back, naturally, inevitably, to Bunn. He had attempted to get the 'Swedish Nightingale' to sing at Drury Lane, two years before. The singer had entered into negotiations and actually signed a contract, but subsequently regretted her action and tried to cancel the contract in order to appear for Lumley at Covent Garden. Bunn took umbrage to this idea. Lumley offered to bear the cost of any legal action which breaking the contract might cause. Jenny Lind appears to have become frightened of the gefuffle that was threatening and, wisely, stayed out of England. When she did make her appearance at Her Majesty's Theatre, it was in May 1847, Bunn brought an action claiming damages for breach of contract. For once he had partial good luck;

the court awarded him £2,500 damages. Lumley was not perturbed; he offered his patrons the person and voice of Marietta Alboni, hailed as 'the most celebrated contralto of the nineteenth century', an Italian, Rossini's only pupil, and a great favourite in St. Petersburg, Vienna, and other European capitals inclined to song.

Jenny Lind was twenty-seven when she came to London. Her career had been marked with continuous excitement from the time when, at the age of nine, she tied a blue ribbon round her cat and sang to it at an open window, attracting the attention of Mlle. Lundberg, a dancer at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm, who arranged for her to be interviewed by Croelius, singing-master at the theatre. Her appearance in London excelled that of any visiting actor or actress before or since. The theatre was crowded, despite greatly increased prices. Victoria sent a presentation bouquet; flowers stacked the stage; the audience roared its delight or wept its misery. Canon Scott Holland was nearly trampled to death. Gloves, handkerchiefs, snuff-boxes, sweet-boxes, tea-trays, match-boxes, all *à la* Lind. Ladies dressed *à la Suedoise;* girls sang the Jenny romance; young men bankrupted themselves on buying flowers and her portrait. In the two years she spent in London she earned £10,500. 'The chaste pure voice, full of grace and virginality', as Meyerbeer described it, paid a good dividend.

Madame Rachel, the great French actress, who also toured Britain in 1847, was a vastly different woman. She had been to Britain before, in 1841-42. She had points in common with Fanny, though it is doubtful whether either of them ever knew it. She had been born in Switzerland, not far from the district where Fanny's mother was born. At the age of four she was singing in the streets and cafés of Rheims, with her sister, to earn pennies; at nine she was singing the *Marseillaise* and the *Parisienne* in the boulevards and cafés of Paris. She made her début at the age of seventeen at the Theatre Français, as Camille in Corneille's *Horace*, then as Roxane in Racine's *Bajazet*, and gained ultimate fame in *Phedre*, in 1843. Rachel was particularly adept at impersonating evil and malignant passion. Some years later she toured America but was unsuccessful, the tuberculosis which was soon to kill her having extinguished the fire that had been her greatest attribute.

Fanny found these other two women too strongly entrenched in London for her to be able to make much headway with her own career. Wisely, she returned to the provinces, biding her time until their seasons ended before making her supreme effort to regain her former pre-eminence in the metropolis.

As she had told Harriet, she went to Southampton. In a letter from her she again reveals her longing to see her children, a need which made her the companion of every child:

> 'Walking up a small back street . . . the other day I saw a little child of about five years old standing at a poor mean kind of pastry-cook's window, looking with eyes of poignant longing, at some baked apples, stale buns, etc. I stopped and asked him if he wished very much for some of those things. He said yes, he wished very much for some baked apples for his little brother who was sick. I wish you could have seen the little creature's face when I gave him money to buy what he wanted; that look of profound desire for the sake of his brother, on the poor little childish face has haunted me. I went to

see his people and found them poor and ill, in much distress. The mother, looking at her youngest child, a sickly, wasted, miserable little object, lamented bitterly that she did not belong to such and such associations, for then "if it should please God to take the child, she would have five pounds to bury it" (I wonder if these wretches are ever killed for the sake of their burial money?); "but now she hadn't so much as would buy a decent rag of mourning"—a useless solicitude, it seemed to me, who think mourning attire a superfluity in all classes.'

From another letter of the same time comes some idea of the extent of her unhappiness:

'I am already back in the harness of my lonely life and feel the galling on the sore places of my spirit less . . . and every hour will bring occupation and business (such as they are, as Hamlet very contemptuously observes), and I shall have something to do—if not to think of. . . .'

In August she told Harriet that 'Rachel has been acting at Manchester to houses of sixty pounds (her nightly salary being one hundred and twenty), and this because Jenny Lind is going there. I must confess I have no patience with this—as if the rich Manchester merchants could not afford to treat themselves to both! Rachel is really pre-eminent in her art, and so this provokes me. . . .'

Fanny's understanding of 'the Brotherhood of Art' was more realistic than Lytton's.

She told Harriet also that the manager of the theatre in Norwich at which she was to play in August had asked her to delay her engagement until September, as Jenny Lind was to sing in Norwich during the same period in August. She had to cancel the engagement completely, not knowing what her other arrangements would be. The whole of her attempt to make a successful come-back was overshadowed by new arrivals, women who came with great reputations and, it must be admitted, the ability to give unvaryingly good performances. But she was aware of the danger and had, indeed, started to plan a way of circumventing it. In the same letter she is already telling Harriet:

'My father talks of giving up his readings (of Shakespeare) and I have therefore spoken to Mitchell, of the St. James's Theatre, about giving some myself, and find him very willing to undertake the whole "speculation" and business, not only in London but all over the provinces, with me and for me; so that I do not feel quite as uncomfortable about the uncertainty of an engagement at the Princess's as I might have done.

'Mr. Mitchell is a Liberal, and an honest man too. . . .'

The letter ends with a footnote which will ring a familiar note with readers of novels and film-goers of a later era. Fanny asks Harriet:

'Do you hear of this horrid murder in Paris, that of the Duchesse de Praslin, by her husband? Ever so many people that I know here knew the unhappy

woman and her still more wretched husband; and the woman who has been accused of having instigated the crime was little Lady Melgund's governess for six years.'

In her memoirs Fanny added a comment to this, which said that 'Mademoiselle de Luzzy, the governess, was acquitted of any complicity in the crime, and later she married the country clergyman in Stockbridge, in "Happy Valley"' where lived Fanny's great friends in America, the Sedgwicks. The clergyman and his wife became the grandparents of the late Rachel Field, who retold their story, and that of the Duc de Praslin, in her novel *All This and Heaven Too*.

After reaching the North of England again Fanny went on to Scotland.

In September she wrote to Lady Dacre:

'Of the advantageous engagement which you heard I had concluded, I cannot speak with any certainty, for it never was settled definitively, and I begin to think it will not be concluded. I think it may have been nothing more than a feint on the part of the manager of the Princess's Theatre, who has been urged by Mr. Macready's friends to engage me to act with him, and who, as he will not give me my terms, has, I think, perhaps merely tendered me an engagement that he knew I would not accept, in order to be able to say that he had endeavoured to make an arrangement with me. I am very sorry about this, for employment during the winter months in London was what I much desired. However, "there is a soul of good even in things evil," and the later experiences of my life have left me little sensibility to spend upon crosses of this description.

'Not to be able to work for my own maintenance would indeed be a serious calamity to me. But if I fail of a theatrical engagement I shall fall back upon my original plan, to me so far preferable, of giving readings. I do not think that now, after a whole year of apparent relinquishment of that pursuit, my father has any thought of resuming it, which leaves me free to make the attempt.'

She added: 'I must either act or give readings during this time, as I can in no wise afford to be idle.'

She went from Edinburgh to spend two nights in Dundee, another two in Perth, returned to Edinburgh, went on to Glasgow for three nights, thence to Greenock, and then back to Edinburgh for ten nights.

In 'the northern Athens' she made an observation shared by many a subsequent visitor:

'The railroad running through the Castle Gardens has cruelly spoiled them, though from the depth of the ravine, at the bottom of which it lies, it is not seen from Prince's Street, but its silver wake floats up above the highest trees of the banks, and the Gardens themselves are ruined by it. I have a sadly affectionate feeling for every inch of that ground. . . . I do not admire Scott's monument very much. It is an exact copy in stone of the Episcopal Throne in Exeter Cathedral, a beautiful piece of wood carving. The difference

between the white colour of the statue and the grey shrine by which it is canopied is not agreeable to me. I should have liked it better if the figure had been of the same stone as the monument, and so of the same colour.'

The following letter contained a comment appropriate to any age:

'All fanaticisms are bad, and the fanaticism of scepticism as bad or perhaps worse than most others, because it wounds more severely the prejudices of others than it can be wounded by them, professing, as it does, to have none to wound.'

She was in Leeds when she heard of the death of Mendelssohn. A comment upon this was contained in a letter to Harriet, but the remainder of the letter was of greater importance to herself:

'I do not know what is to be done with Covent Garden. I suppose it will remain an Opera House; for to fit it for that it has been made well-nigh unavailable for any other purpose, as I think we shall find on the 7th December, when a representation of "Scenes" from various of Shakespeare's plays is to take place there, for the purpose of raising funds for the purchase of the house Shakespeare was born in.'

After this truly atrociously framed sentence comes a severe stricture:

'You know what my love and veneration for Shakespeare are. You know too how comparatively indifferent to me are those parts of the natures, even of those I must love and honour, which belong only to their mortality. The dead bodies of my friends appeal, perhaps, even less than they should do to my feelings, since they have been temporarily inhabited and informed by their souls. But, acquainted as you are with these notions of mine, you will understand, that I do not entirely sympathize with all that is being said and done about the four walls between which the king of poets came into this world. The thing is more distasteful to me, because originally got up by an American charlatan of the first water, with a view to thrust himself into notoriety by shrieking about the world stupendous commonplaces about the houses where Shakespeare was born. It has been taken up by a number of people, theatrical and other, who, with the exception of Macready, have many of them the same petty personal objects in view. Those whose profession compels them, by the absolute necessity of its conditions, to garble and hack and desecrate works which else could not be fit for acting purposes (a fact which in itself sets forth what theatrical representation really is and always must be—do read, *a propos* to this, Serlo's answer to *Wilhelm Meister* about the impossibility of representing dramatically a great poetical whole), and who now, on this very Shakespearian integrity, and taking zealously any, the most insignificant part in it, have arranged a series of truncated, isolated scenes, that the actors may each be the hero or heroine of their own *bit* of Shakespeare. . . . This is all I know of the immediate destinies of Covent

Garden. They have written to me to act the dying scene of Queen Katherine, to which I have agreed, not choosing to decline any part assigned me in this "Celebration," little as I sympathize with it.'

The road wound on and on, through late summer, autumn, the early winter months. In a letter on religion, written a few weeks before Christmas, she said:

'Superstition, terror, hope, misery, joy—every one of these sentiments brings paroxysms in every man's life, when some idea of God is seized upon, no matter of what value, no matter how soon relinquished, how evanescent. Eternity is long enough for the progress of those that are lowest in our moral scale. You know that I believe in the progress of the human race, as I do in its immortality. . . . Revelation, you say, alone gives any image of God to you; but which revelation? When did God begin or when has He ceased to reveal Himself to man? . . . I believe all God's creatures have known Him in such proportion as He and *they* have chosen. . . .'

Her money sense had increased and her appreciation of the value of money:

'The saving of money without any special motive for it does not appear to be desirable, any more than self-denial without a sufficient motive—and I do not call mere mortification such—appears to me reasonable. I do not feel called upon to curtail the comforts of my daily life, for in some respects it is always miserable, and in many respects often inevitably very uncomfortable. While I am labouring to spare sacrifice and disgrace to others, I do not see any very strong motive for not applying a sufficient portion of the money I work so hard for, to make my wandering and homeless life as endurable as I can. . . .'

Her political judgment was as shrewd as ever. Utopian, in some respects, but containing a practicality yet to be learned by politicians throughout the world, in every country:

'Moral principles are the true political laws (mere abstract truisms, as they are held to be, and accordingly overlooked, by *working* statesmen) by which the social world is kept in cohesion, just as the physical world is kept in equilibrium by the attracting and repelling forces that control its elements.'

She was equally aware of changes occurring in the world around her as she travelled up and down and across Britain, from city to city, town to town:

'The books that women write now are a curious sign of the times, and an indication of great changes in opinion, as well as alteration in practice.

'After all, women are *part* men, "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." As long as they benefited—and they did highly—by the predominance of the conservative spirit in civilized society, they were the most timid and obstinate of conservatives. But emancipation, or, to speak more civilly, freedom is

dawning upon them from various quarters. Democracy is coming to rule the earth. Women are discovering that in *that* atmosphere they must henceforth breathe, and live, and move, and have their being.

'But the beginning of a great deal of male freedom is mere emancipation; and so it will be, I suppose, with women. The drunken exultation of Caliban is no bad illustration of the emancipation of a slave; and the ladies, more gracefully intoxicated with the elixir vitæ of liberty, may rejoice no more to "scrape trencher or wash dish" but write books (more or less foolish) instead.'

In another letter she added:

'Publicity is the safest of all protections, as in some sense freedom is also. Women, I suppose, will find this out, as the people are finding it out. But in the beginning of their practise people in general, and women in particular, will do some wonderful things. The women especially, having for the most part had hitherto little positive or practical knowledge of life, will be apt "to make all earth amazed" with the first performances of various kinds of their new experience; but it is all in the day's work of the good old world which is ordained to see reasonable and good men and women upon its ancient, ever-blooming surface, in greater numbers henceforward than hitherto: but beginnings are strange. . . .'

Early in the new year of 1848, Fanny returned to London, and in February appeared at the Princess's Theatre to play opposite Macready. The plays were *Macbeth*, *Henry VIII*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *King Lear*. The combination was not a happy one. Macready was known for his 'realist' acting. He was inclined to give full power to his gestures while on the stage, even at rehearsal. At a morning rehearsal of *Macbeth*, Fanny found him 'unnecessarily violent' when he grasped her wrist to declaim, "Bring forth men-children only" and compelled her 'to make a demivolte or pirouette, such as I think that lady did surely never perform under the influence of her husband's admiration.' Most actresses feared to appear opposite him, knowing that they were likely to leave the stage sadly bruised. Fanny found his habit of moving round the stage while being addressed disconcerting, and disliked equally his trick of standing many feet away and of leaving the stage in the middle of a speech addressed to him. His lack of poetry in declamation, his inability to give blank verse poetic emphasis, aided to the discomfort she experienced while with him.

The season witnessed some sharp friction between them. Macready accused Fanny of lacking understanding of even the fundamentals of acting. She rejoined by stating that he relied solely upon technical ability to secure his effects. The matter reached its climax over Fanny's interpretation of Desdemona, in *Othello*, particularly the scene in which she is strangled by the Moor. Fanny told Harriet:

'That smothering scene is most extremely horrible, and like nothing in the world but the catastrophe of poor Madame de Praslin. I think I shall make a desperate fight for it, for I feel horribly at the idea of being murdered in my bed. The Desdemonas that I have seen on the English stage have always

appeared to me to acquiesce with wonderful equanimity in their assassination. On the Italian stage they run for their lives round the bedroom, Pasta (*sic*) in the opera (and Salvini in the tragedy, I believe), clutching them finally by the hair of the head, and then murdering them. The bed-gown in which I have arrayed Desdemona for the night would hardly have admitted of this flight round the stage. Besides that, Shakespeare's text gives no hint of any such attempted escape on poor Desdemona's part. I did think I should like to be murdered, and, therefore, at the last, got up on my knees on the bed, and threw my arms tight round Othello's neck (having previously warned Mr. Macready, and begged his pardon for the liberty), that being my notion of the poor creature's last appeal for mercy.'

This account, which is true, casts a vastly different light upon the incident to that fitful gleam with which some have seen fit to distort the whole of Fanny's acting relationship to Macready, and to her detriment.

The critics appeared to have found Fanny's acting during the season to their liking. The *Theatrical Times* said that the Kemble voice and manner of acting ruled the London stage again and added, at a later occasion, that according to one who had witnessed one performance, no representative of the dramatic art on the English stage could equal the performance they had watched her give.

Even Macready noted in his diary, after the season, that Fanny was 'one of the most remarkable women of the present day.'

Another famous, or infamous, woman was causing some comment throughout Europe at this time. In a letter to Harriet at this time she observes:

'Was there ever such a to-do as that woman Lola Montez is kicking up? Everybody is turning Catholic as fast as possible, and the good Churchwomen are every way in despair. They already see their sons all circumcized and their daughters refusing to eat ham, and their brothers and husbands confessing the Real Presence.'

Lola Montez had first appeared at Her Majesty's Theatre in the summer of 1843, billed as a Spanish dancer. She was reputed to eclipse Taglioni and Fanny Elssler. Her real name was James—as one of the audience caddishly announced at the top of his voice on the opening night—and though she claimed descent from a blue-blooded mixture of Spanish and Irish blood, she was actually the daughter of an ensign in the Forty-Fourth Foot Regiment and a Creole lady. Born in 1818, she worked her way to become one of the most famous courtesans of history. In 1848, the time at which she was creating interest, she was mistress of the Bavarian Ludwig I, that 'mixture of Haroun-al-Raschid and Henry IV,' one of those periodic Germans who delight in peppering Bavaria and the Rhine Palatine with solid and dull architecture, and who had recently called on Prince von Oettingen-Wallerstein and the government he headed, known impolitely as the 'Lolaministerium,' to aid his other passion, the Irish-Creole, who, only a few months later, was to escape from suffering Munich clad as a boy while he abdicated in favour of his son. Lola was not a democrat, it would seem; she was a

reactionary to an age when a woman's politics were best evinced when clad in more delicate and obtrusive diplomacies.

The legitimate drama in Britain was faring worse than the illegitimate comedies of German princelings.

Before the Shakespearian season at the Princess's Theatre ended Macready announced to friends that he intended to retire shortly, owing to the 'intolerable' conditions in which the drama was placed. His final performance was actually only a short while under three years later, in February 1851, shortly after the death of one of his daughters at an early age.

Every theatre was complaining of financial difficulties. The trouble was not limited to Britain alone; it included most of the European countries. The immediate causes were threefold: a sudden onrush of popularity for opera, which bred interest in other branches of musical entertainment; the rapid development of the music-halls; and finally, and perhaps most importantly of all, a dearth of dramatists capable of reflecting the contemporary scene in such guise as to afford audiences pleasure at beholding and players interest in performing. In truth, the drama was far behind the mentality of the day. Audiences tired of witnessing floppy-soppy farces and statuesque melodramas as the only alternative to Shakespeare, who also suffered in consequence. Artistes wearied of playing pieces utterly out of touch with the world they knew and in whose gyrations they could find no easy garment in which to array themselves. Macready's season at the Princess's failed to stem the tide of increasing financial difficulties; only a few weeks later the same theatre was forced to bow to the change in public taste and present a season of opera to recoup its past losses on drama. In consequence, most actors of the period ended their days attended by financial worries; some increased by disastrous experiments in management, most owing to the decline of the drama. Kean, the 'most human'; Kemble, the 'most classical,' and finally, Macready, the 'most romantic,' to quote Talfourd's reckoning, all experienced their difficulties: only Kean had personal weaknesses to aid to the other causes for worry. Another reason may have been that these great players, being but men, failed to understand and, therefore, to adapt themselves to the world which changed so rapidly about them and out-dated their styles of acting and habits of thought. Thus, the great actors of the first half of the nineteenth century were reaching the end of their era. They had contributed a rich, glowing, vital page to the history of British drama; now it was turning, folding upon them and their work. It was a period of failure, bewilderment, great courage, and tragedy.

The season at the Princess's ended Fanny's theatrical career on the stage proper.

A few weeks later she made her initial appearance as a Shakespearian reader. Lady Charlotte Greville offered the drawing-room of her new house for the first reading, but Fanny refused the offer. She refused also an opportunity to read *Antigone* at Buckingham Palace for the Queen, and heard subsequently that the Queen had felt some displeasure at the refusal. But Fanny disliked having such a strain at her first performance, and the added worry of having Mendelssohn's choruses played as a background to the reading. Instead she gave her first public reading at a small hall in Highgate village.

The project was a complete and unqualified success.

Managers from halls throughout the country wrote asking her for dates when she would perform for their audiences.

On 3rd April, 1848, she gave the first of her London readings, at Willis's Rooms in King Street, St. James. The play she chose was *The Merchant of Venice*. The Rooms were crowded with critics, friends, and members of society. The critics acclaimed her without exception. Her success was complete. At her very first attempt she had finally gained for Shakespeare the hearing she had long believed was the only one in which the true beauty of his work could be appreciated. More requests from managers poured into her London home, asking her to give readings.

She tackled the work in a businesslike and, therefore, artistic manner. The plays she read were *The Merchant of Venice*, *King Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *Macbeth*, *Richard II*, *King John*, both sections of *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Richard III*, *Henry VIII*, *Coriolanus*, *Julius Cæsar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Winter's Tale*, *Measure for Measure*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *The Tempest*.

The method of presentation was largely that used by Charles for his readings. Each play was the subject of a separate performance, lasting two hours and with a ten-minute intermission. To maintain the story of each play she cut out extraneous material, but frequently cheated herself in order to retain passages for which she had particular affection. At the commencement of her public reading she read each of the plays listed, but had to cut out some when it was found that the public, not realizing what it was missing, stayed away and attended only those already familiar.

Mrs. Craven, the French wife of the Augustus Craven with whom one of Fanny's biographers has envisaged a broken romance, attended one of her readings and wrote later: 'Elle le fascinait au point de lui faire VOIR, jusqu'aux paysages dont elle parlait, de lui faire entendre le mugissement de la mer ou le bruit de la tempête ébranlant la forêt.'

The success Fanny gained in this work must have seemed to be the greatest happiness she had yet encountered. It arose solely from her own exertions, depended entirely upon her own powers, and involved the co-operation, good, bad, indifferent, and always uncertain, of none. It took her away from the stage and yet provided an opportunity to enjoy Shakespeare, the poetry, thought, observation, intelligence, and beauty, which she worshipped. She was able to listen to the words as she spoke them, seek to impart into them the subtlest nuances of expression and feeling which acting, and the participation of others, had denied her. And it provided also a livelihood to which she found no irritating resentment. She was, in fact, the legitimate forerunner of the modern *diseuse* and gained great joy from her work.

Four days after her first reading at Highgate, Pierce Butler appeared at the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia and lodged a suit for divorce against her.

Butler charged Fanny with wilfully, maliciously, and without reasonable cause, deserting his home on 11th September, 1845.

Unaware of this threat to her new-found happiness, Fanny started a tour

of the provinces. In a letter stretching over several days, written in Manchester, she told Harriet:

'At the conclusion of my reading yesterday evening, letters were put into my hands containing no fewer than six offers of new engagements. Situated as I am, I cannot reject this money. I have endeavoured, in answering these invitations, to get the readings all as close to each other as possible, and I now think that I may get off about the 22nd; but the same sort of interruption to my plans may occur again and I may be delayed, though I have got my passport and have even written to bespeak rooms at an hotel. . . .

'I do not read at Manchester to-day, but Hallé, who conducts the music, wishes me to attend a rehearsal, which I am anxious to do at his request. On Monday I read *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and on Tuesday *Macbeth*. . . .

' . . . Dear Harriet, if you will come to Switzerland this summer, nothing but some insuperable impediments shall prevent my meeting you there. If you are "old and stuffy," I am *fat, stuffy, puffy, and old;* and you are not of such proportions as to break a mule's back, whereas if I got on one I should expect it to cast itself and me down the first convenient precipice, only to avoid carrying me to the next.'

The comment on 'getting off' and passports was in connection with an intended holiday in Europe that year. From Manchester, in the memoirs, Fanny added a note on Charles Hallé, founder of the orchestra which bears his name, a native of Westphalia who was knighted thirty-one years after the orchestra was formed. She said that 'Hallé was an admirable musician, a most amiable man, and one of the best masters of our modern day. His style was more remarkable for sensibility, delicacy, and refinement, than for power or brilliance of execution of his rendering of Beethoven to that of all the other virtuosi I ever heard; and some of the hours of greatest musical enjoyment I have had in my life I owe to him, when he and his friend Joachim (played) to a small circle of enthusiastic and grateful listeners. . . .'

From Manchester, Fanny went on to Hull. From here she wrote a letter which provides a grimly authentic picture of the plight of some children in wealthy Victorian England in the 'hungry 'forties.' She was out for a walk with Mr. Frost, president of the Literary and Scientific Institution which had engaged her for a reading when:

" . . . I remarked . . . on what I took at first for a bundle of rags. On looking again, however, I perceived there was a live creature in the rags—a boy, whose attitude of suffering and weariness, as he crouched upon the pavement, was the most wretched thing you can imagine. I knelt down by him and asked what ailed him. He hardly lifted his face from his hands and said, "Headache,"; and then, coughing horribly, buried his miserable face again. Mr. Frost, seeing I still knelt by him, began to ask him questions. Then followed one of those piteous tales which make one smart all over while one listens to them. Parental desertion, mother marrying a second time, cruelty from the stepfather, beating, starving, and final abandonment. He did

not know what had become of them. They had gone away to avoid paying their rent, and left the boy to shift for himself. "How long ago was that?" said Mr. Frost. "Before snow," said the boy—the snow has been gone a fortnight and more from this neighbourhood, and all that time the child, by his own account, has wandered up and down, living by begging, and sleeping in barns and stables and passages.

'The interrogatory was a prolonged one. My friend Mr. Frost is slow by age, and cautious by profession, and a man by nature, and so not irresistibly prompted to seize up such an unfortunate at once in his arms, and adopt it for his own. In the course of his answers the boy, among other things, said, "I wouldn't mind only for little brother." "How old is he?" "Going on two year." "Where is he?" "Mother got him." "Oh, well, then, you needn't fret about him; she'll take care of him." "No, she won't; he won't be having nothing to eat, I know he won't." The boy covered his face again in a sullen despair that was pitiful to see.

'Now, you know, Hal, this boy was not begging. He did not come to us with a pathetic appeal about his starving little brother. He was lying starving himself, and stupefied, with his head covered over, buried in his rags when I spoke to him. This touching reminiscence of his poor little stepbrother came out in the course of Mr. Frost's interrogatory, accidentally, and made my heart ache. The boy had been in the workhouse for two years, with his mother, before she married this second husband; and, saying that he had been sent to school, and kindly treated, and well fed in the workhouse, I asked if he would go back thither, and he said yes. So, rather to Mr. Frost's amazement, I think, I got a cab, and put the child in, and with my kind old gentleman—who, in spite of obvious repugnance to such close quarters with the poor tatterdemalion, would by no means leave me alone in the adventure—we carried the small forsaken soul to the workhouse, where we got him, with much difficulty, *temporarily* received. The wife of the master of the poor-house knew the boy again, and corroborated much of what he had told us, adding that he was a good boy enough while he was there with his mother, but—would you believe it?—she also told us that this poor little creature had come to their gate the night before, begging admittance, but that, because he had not a *certain written order* from a certain officer, the rules of the establishment prevented their receiving him, and he had been turned away *of course*.

'I was in a succession of convulsions of rage and crying all this time, and so adjured and besought poor old Mr. Frost to take instant measures to help the little outcast, that when we left him by the workhouse fire, the woman having gone to get him some food, and I returned blaspheming and blubbering to my inn, he—Mr. Frost—went off in search of a principal police-officer of Hull, from whom he hoped to obtain some further information about the child, which he presently brought back to me. "Oh, yes, the magistrate knew the child; he had *sent him to prison* already several times for being found lying at night on the wharves and about the streets." So this poor little wretch was *sent to prison*, because literally he had nowhere to lay his head! . . . I wouldn't be a man for anything! They are so cruel, without even knowing that they are so: the habit of seeing sin and suffering is such a *heart-hardener*.

'Well, the boy is safe in the workhouse now, and in accordance with his own wish and inclination, will either be sent to sea or put out apprentice to some trade. I have pledged one of my readings for purposes of outfit or entrance fee, and Mr. Frost has promised me not to lose sight of the child, so I hope he is rescued from sin and suffering, for the present, and perhaps for the future.

'Do you remember what infinite difficulty I told you I had had in rescuing that poor little wretch out in the streets of Glasgow? But then, she had the advantage of a *mother*—who drove her into them day after day to sing her starvation in the miserable mud and rain—luckily this poor Hull boy's mother had not this *interest* in him.'

It is doubtful whether Dickens's novels contain a more authentic story of a child starving in the streets of England than this episode in one of Fanny's letters. Like many other glimpses of life in the Britain she knew, it has strangely escaped attention.

The generosity of theatrical people to the poor, whether of their own profession or any other, is well known. Fanny was no exception to the rule. Throughout her life suffering always impelled her to take whatever means she could to remove it, whether it was the poverty of relatives of a dead actor, children in the streets, or negroes in bondage.

The hopes she appeared to have entertained of going both to Ireland and Europe that year did not materialize. News of Butler's action reached her, cancelling all her arrangements. She set about preparing to return to America.

There is some confusion about what was going on in Fanny's mind at this time. It has been suggested that she was intending to return to the Butler house in Philadelphia, confront her husband, and seek a reconciliation. It is true that she wrote 'I seldom waste time in blaming myself and tarry but a brief space in the idle disconsolateness of repentance,' a comment taken by some as meaning that she presumed Butler might share the same opinion after their two years' separation. Such a construction appears hardly feasible, as her knowledge of Butler's mentality extended over several years and she had no reason to presume he might have changed his mind or heart. Their quarrels had been bitter; he had contributed nothing to her support; no word had arrived even indicating willingness on his part to forget the past. It is a nice theory which these others have worked out, but it is defeated by evidence operating against it. Moreover, when she finally set sail for America she had to cancel engagements for six weeks. She wrote to a friend:

'I sail for America on Saturday the 13th—to-morrow. I fully proposed to have written . . . to bid you good-bye and remember me. My sister will reach England exactly two days after I have left it, and only for the next six weeks I have engagements made to read which would have paid me upwards of six hundred pounds, which I must now forgo, and accept instead grief, vexation, and loss . . . and all is utter uncertainty before me; but you know I have good courage, and faith, and hope, the foundations of which cannot

be shaken by human hands, so that nothing can go desperately wrong with me.'

On 9th October, of that year, she filed an answer to Butler's charges. She agreed that she had left his house and had not returned, but denied that her absence had been either wilful or malicious within the legal interpretation. She stated that Butler had absented himself from her as a husband for a long time, that he had given his agreement to her leaving, that his attitude toward her for some time previous to her departure had been intended to send her away, but that his treatment and the personal indignities inflicted upon her by him would never have sent her away unless she had had his permission. Butler, she affirmed, had never sought her return to their home, though in her final note to him she had displayed a willingness to do so if he restored her to her proper relationship with her children. She asked that the matter be tried by jury on the issue or issues formed according to the Act of the Assembly.

The application came before the Court of Common Pleas in Philadelphia in October. At the end of November the attorneys made their statements before the three judges. The Court's opinion was announced at the beginning of the following year, in January 1849. It refused to decree a divorce for Butler, referring the matter to trial by jury. Fanny, it stated, had acted contrary to practice by submitting a long answer to Butler's charge; everything outside of her denial of the allegation was to be stricken from the record. The judges opined that neither Butler nor Fanny could claim desertion from a separation made by mutual consent, as either might have terminated the agreement by recalling the other. In such case the party who remained absent after being recalled would be guilty of desertion, unless they provided evidence of previous cause such as to warrant their refusing to return. The Court then laid down a principle, that cruelties which warranted the withdrawal of the injured party need not be bodily injuries. Through Butler's refusal to furnish necessities, or a course of humiliating persecutions, annoyances, and indignities, he had committed what amounted to legal cruelty.

Fanny had won her right for trial by jury.

At the opening of the following month she wrote to a friend on the issue of divorce in America:

'Pennsylvania, you know, is greatly peopled by Germans, and the divorce law there follows that of Germany, which itself is founded on the French Code Napoleon. It admits divorce on the plea of desertion (non-cohabitation) on the part of husband or wife for a space of two consecutive years. I believe a joint appeal may procure a separation from the legislature upon the ground of absolute incompatibility of temper and character, and also that a legal separation of person and property is sometimes allowed for other reasons. None of these processes of relief from the bonds of matrimony are available to Roman Catholics in America, any more than elsewhere. Marriage is one of the sacraments of their church, to be annulled only by the authority of the Pope. The greater facility for obtaining divorce in the State of Pennsylvania occasionally induces citizens of other States to appeal to the Philadelphia

tribunals. In Massachusetts, where the English law prevails, divorce is granted only for cases of adultery.'

The case had been set down for hearing in April, but was postponed until September, when the application for divorce was due to come before the Court of Common Pleas. It was then announced that Fanny had accepted a compromise in preference to further litigation. Butler had offered Fanny an annual allowance of 1,500 dollars and agreed that the children should be with her for two months of every year. As a result of this offer, she withdrew her application for trial by jury. Later in the same month, the Court announced a decree of divorce, with both parties free to remarry should they so desire.

Throughout the months waiting upon these events Fanny had occupied her time by reading. She started with *The Merchant of Venice* at the Masonic Temple in Boston, in the middle of January.

Her success was even greater than it had been in Britain. A correspondent to the *American Courier* wrote that 'though the fire of true genius has been hidden for many years, and, seemingly, had burned low for want of fuel, it was still undimmed.'

Each time she read in Boston the hall was crowded. People waited days to obtain tickets for the performance. Longfellow attended most evenings of the four nights a week on which she gave a reading and the edited record of his life contains a note which reads: 'Mrs. Butler read *King Lear* and wonderfully well; too tragic a play for those who have any sorrows of their own. . . . *Hamlet* sublimely read; with the only true comprehension and expression of the melancholy Dane I have ever had the good fortune to hear. What nights these are!—with Shakespeare and such a reader.'

To honour the occasion he wrote the following sonnet:

> O precious evenings all too swiftly sped!
> Leaving us heirs to amplest heritages
> Of all the best thoughts of the greatest sages,
> And giving tongue unto the silent dead!
> How our hearts glowed and trembled as she read,
> Interpreting by tones the wondrous pages
> Of the great poet who foreruns the ages,
> Anticipating all that shall be said!
> O happy reader! having for thy text
> The magic book, whose sibylline leaves have caught
> The rarest essence of all human thought!
> O happy Poet! by no critic vext!
> How must thy listening spirit now rejoice
> To be interpreted by such a voice!

From Boston, Fanny went to New York, where Macready had already given readings. Public and critics alike, to quote the *New York Albion*, found her interpretations more effective, more picturesque, than Macready's, and lightened by a style which was adapted to the world whereas his were more suitable to the

college. The same critic acclaimed Fanny as the only true interpreter of Shakespeare's divine imaginings. The Stuyvesant Institute was crowded to hear her. In the month she read there her earnings were estimated to amount to nearly 8,000 dollars.

From New York she passed on to Albany, where, at the Female Academy, for three readings, she earned £500. She returned to New York to perform at a charity concert and gave £75 to the widow and children of an actor who had died leaving them penniless.

From New York she went on to other cities, other towns, other halls, other audiences of rich and poor, cultured and unacquainted with Shakespeare, wherever she was asked to perform.

In October 1849, a few days after the divorce had been announced, she appeared on the stage of the Sansom Street Hall, Philadelphia, to read *Henry V.*

CHAPTER X

SHE was to live another forty-three years until, an old lady full of her eighty-three years, she reached the fifteenth day of January in the year 1893.

Much was to happen to the world, the world, the stage she knew in those years. . . .

Charles, her father, the last Kemble to be connected with Covent Garden, was to die four years after she had started her new career in America; her mother had died eighteen years before, when Fanny had been setting forth with her husband and daughters to visit the Georgia plantations. With Charles's passing the words of Leigh Hunt, written after Charles's official farewell from the stage, were to come true: 'Where now shall we seek the high Roman fashion of look, and gesture, and attitude? Where shall old chivalry retain her living image, and high thoughts "seated in a heart of courtesy" have adequate expression? Whither shall we look for gentlemanly mirth, for gallant ease, for delicate raillery, and gay, glittering enterprise?' The name of Kemble would never fade from the scrolls of English stage history, but those who made it famous were passing behind the final curtain.

Covent Garden Theatre was to die another death. On the morning of 5th March, 1856, when a *bal masque* was ending with the orchestra playing 'God Save The Queen' and dawn lightened the skies over London, the theatre which two generations of Kembles had fought to save was again on fire. Anderson, the self-styled 'Wizard of the North,' was tenant at the time. A small crowd of dancers was moving round the floor from which stall-seats had been removed, when Anderson rushed in and gave the warning that the theatre was on fire. ' . . . the few people left rushed to the entrances, the gas was turned off, women were trampled on, wreaths of smoke and sheets of flame burst through the roof, and the police alone maintained that wonderful calmness and presence of mind which distinguishes them as a body,' wrote an eye-witness. He continued: 'And now the flames had burst through the roof, and columns of fire darting into the air illuminated the surrounding neighbourhood for a distance of three miles, and showed the distant Surrey hills standing out in bold relief. The glare, visible throughout the entire metropolis, roused the watches at every station throughout of the fire-brigade, and in a very few minutes the galloping of horses and the lumbering noise of the engines was heard at the end of Bow Street . . . the supply of water was excellent, but those acquainted with the interiors of theatres knew that every piece of woodwork was so heated with the constant gas as to be almost in the condition of touch-wood, and that all the scenes, wings, flats, cordage, canvas, and theatrical property generally, were peculiarly inflammable. The fire then, pent up, furnace-like, within the four huge walls, burnt with incredible velocity, until half-past five o'clock. Then, with a tremendous crash, the roof fell in, a volcano of sparks was shot into the air. . . . All the fittings and decorations, all the magnificent scenery . . . all the mountings, dresses, and properties of sixty operas; the dramatic library . . . the valuable operatic scores, some of which by Donizetti and Weber, including the

original score of *Oberon*, can never be replaced, the original MSS. of *The School for Scandal*, the armoury, and four original paintings by Hogarth, were destroyed in the fire.' Thus, in agony, Covent Garden Theatre died again. Many mourners attended on the ill-starred theatre. Queen Victoria, the Prince Consort, and the Princess Royal, headed those who went to see the ruins the very next day. They were followed by hundreds of Londoners and many who had been regular patrons throughout the theatre's vicissitudes, including the Duchess of Wellington, the Duke of Bedford, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lady Pell, Lord Ward and Lord Colville, the Duke of Cambridge, Prince Alfred, and the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII. The latter took away relics from the debris to keep as mementoes of the theatre. The British people, who are not given to sentiment, become as sad over the death of one of their theatres as they are when one of their great battleships plunges to the bottom in its death agonies.

Macready, who with Kean was the forerunner of the modern school of acting, was to die in 1873, twenty-two years after his farewell performance had been greeted by Tennyson, a poet given to stately comments on arrivals and farewells, with the lines which began: 'Farewell, Macready, since to-night we part: full-handed thunders often have contest thy power well-used to move the public breast. . . .' Macready died almost forgotten, almost alone, a paralysed old man sitting in his arm-chair, a shawl draped over his shoulders, eyesight failing, memory failing, his lips moving slowly and with difficulty over lines of the parts he had played.

Harriet St. Leger was to die shortly after Macready, a few months after Fanny wrote her, 'You will never be altered to me. Those that we love never alter, unless we cease to love them, and I am ever as ever, your Fanny Kemble, as you will be to the last, ever as ever, my Harriet St. Leger.' At her death Harriet was in her eightieth year, an invalid and blind.

Pierce Butler was to die. Before his death he was to be accused of acting as an agent for the Confederate States, receiving money for the purchase and transport of arms. When he brought an action against the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, for trespass, assault and battery, Lincoln exonerated the Secretary's action as necessary for the prompt suppression of the existing insurrection. Fanny too was to play her part in the Civil War, over the issue of slavery. Gladstone, showing too strong a regard for diplomacy, told a British audience: 'Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the Confederacy have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made, what is more important than either, they have made a nation.' Fanny read into Gladstone's words a danger of the perpetuation of the slave system, if they inspired Britain to forswear her position of sitting on the fence and she fell over on to the Confederate side. In 1863 she published her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation* in London during May and in New York during July, giving the slave conditions on her former husband's plantations as she had witnessed them. The book may not possess material for the extravagant claims made for it as affecting leaders of public opinion and political action, but it did exercise a strong effect upon the public which made it a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic and upon the critics, many of whom regarded it as a factual *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Six years later, Butler, a man who had gained position and ease from work done on his plantations by the

unfortunate negroes, who would probably have been a better man if he had worked hard, died in Philadelphia.

Two years before her former husband's death, Fanny would be travelling to London and upon arrival hear of the assassination of Lincoln, an event which distressed her so greatly that she could not speak and could scarcely stand.

Alfred Bunn, the brave, the foolish, the gallant, whose management of Covent Garden was regarded as gambling of the most reckless description, was to die in 1860.

Fanny's own daughters were to grow to maturity and marry; Sarah to Dr. Owen Wister, Fan to the Reverend and Honourable James Wentworth Leigh; Fan would have her own daughter, Alice Dudley Leigh.

Through twenty of those years Fanny would travel Britain and America, reading in halls in every city and town to which she was invited. She would sit before innumerable crimson-covered tables flanked with crimson screens, changing her dress for whatever play she was reading: dark green velvet, white silk and lace for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, a lace collar over a black silk gown for *Coriolanus*, black velvet for *King Lear*, white satin for *Romeo and Juliet*, dark blue or purple velvet for the historical plays, black velvet again with a broad blue silk ribbon on her breast for *Richard III*.

New theatres would appear. There would be the Comedy, the New Chelsea (Court); the Criterion; Daly's would be built the year before she died and open with *The Taming of the Shrew* a few weeks after she was buried; the Trafalgar Square (Duke of York's); the Gaiety, where the matinée would be introduced; the Garrick would open with Pinero's *Profligate;* the Globe; the third house to be known as His Majesty's Theatre would be 'plucked down,' that unfortunate theatre which had already been twice destroyed by fire and which not even Sarah Bernhardt, Wagner, and Moody & Sankey revival meetings could save, and which, like Covent Garden, would rise again, phœnix-like, above its own ashes; the London Pavilion would start its uneasy career as a variety house, theatre, and ultimately cinema; the Lyceum, which had been the English Opera House, would hear Irving in *The Bells;* the Lyric would open with Marie Tempest and Haydn Coffin in *Dorothy;* in 1884 a piece entitled *Breaking the Butterfly* by a foreign dramatist named Ibsen would open the Prince of Wales, and the piece would be revived later under the title of *A Doll's House;* in 1881 *Patience* would herald the arrival of Gilbert and Sullivan at the Savoy under the control of Richard D'Oyly Carte; the Shaftesbury would open with *As You Like It* in 1888 and the Vaudeville would bring a sensational 400 nights' revival of *The School for Scandal* and introduce Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and *Rosmersholm* to London.

New names would come into the theatre, Irving, Ellen Terry, the Bancrofts, Forbes-Robertson, John Martin Harvey, Gilbert and Sullivan, Herbert Tree, Arthur Bourchier, the Vanbrughs, and the others, and, at long last, a new, vitalized group of dramatists, Oscar Wilde, Sir Arthur Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, while behind them, already moving towards the theatre, could be seen the new red beard of Mr. Shaw; the gentle revolutionary, John Galsworthy; J. M. Synge; the puckish Sir James Barrie; the great poet, J. B. Yeats; and the subtle terrorist, E. J. M. D. Plunkett, Lord Dunsany. New life, new ideas, new

interpretations were to find their way into the theatre through the last years of Fanny's life.

In 1877 she was to bid farewell to America for the last time and return to a London where Dizzy was the most dramatic political figure in the salons, where Pre-Raphaelites were in full flood and Millais had just completed painting a *Yeoman of the Guard* who was so aged and infirm that he had to be fed with hot soup every fifteen minutes to sustain him for the ordeal; where Holman Hunt, last of the breed, just back from the Holy Land, was fighting the devil and typhoid to complete *The Triumph of the Innocents;* where William Morris was mixing dyeing and weaving into the exciting fabric of political agitation; where Wilde listened intently to Ruskin's lectures, warmed his hands at the 'hard gem-like flame' of Walter Pater, and poor little Simeon Solomon, from Bishopsgate Without, tired of posing in ancient Greek costume, with laurels round his brow, sandals on his feet, and a lyre in his hand, was furiously painting canvases representing 'Love dying by the Breath of Lust.'

Henry James was to be her last friend; James, like herself a great traveller from the time he left his native America and hastened to London, Paris, Geneva; who, again like her, wrote all through his life of passionate pilgrimage, finding that his interest in people, the things they thought and talked about, their conversation and motives, provided him a lifetime's work and her a lifetime's interest.

On the morning of 15th January, 1893, James Leigh, Fanny's son-in-law, at whose house in Gloucester Place she was staying, telegraphed Henry James, asking him to go there immediately. James hurried to Gloucester Place at once. Leigh said James was of 'greatest assistance' in interviewing reporters who visited the house seeking news of Fanny's death. She had suffered from asthma for years, her eyesight was failing, she was growing deaf, and suddenly her heart had failed her—failed the woman who once said that if she could choose the shape of death it would be 'to break my neck off the back of a good horse at a full gallop on a fine day.' Five days later a mass of camellias, white tulips, hyacinths, chrysanthemums, a cross of double daffodils around an inner cross of mauve anemones, and lilies-of-the-valley, covered her coffin in a chapel at Kensal Green.

Did Fanny leave any mark on the history of the British theatre? As a woman, a thinker, she was one of the most remarkable of her century. What of her position in the theatre?

Weighty argument may be anticipated here.

She disliked the life of those engaged in the theatre, she believed it denied her beloved Shakespeare his true glory, and she experienced moments of horror at having to share such a life and such sacrilege. With her knowledge of the Kemble history to influence her, particularly her own father's lengthy misery at Covent Garden Theatre, such a dislike was surely not unnatural. She was not the only player who has disliked the life and there are many others who dislike their work in different spheres and the life it causes them to lead. We may believe that as a woman she was lonely, desperately lonely throughout the majority of her life. From the beginning she lacked the great, absorbing love for another human which alone could have given her true completion; the tragedy of any intelligent woman lies in that she can never wholly accept a half or three-quarter emotional relationship, it must drown out the faintest whisper of her intellect or she is

doomed to a half-life. Butler failed utterly to meet her needs; in youth and middle age the work she disliked was a poor substitute for affection; in greater age the fires had burned away: she gained philosophy but not completion.

Was she an outstanding actress? In her generation, yes; ultimately, no. Her work was characterized too greatly by change, too subject to influence by her moods. The slightest worry in her early years as an actress was sufficient to mar her performance. She admitted as much herself. Nevertheless many critics found much of her work outstanding. They admired her power, her restraint, her intelligence, control, passion, and elegance. Her influence on the American theatre was greater than it was here. She took to the United States a quality of feminine acting which had not been seen there before; the critics of the time stated this and there is no reason to challenge their contemporaneous knowledge. Oddly enough, upon reflection it may be realized that her influence in America gained its importance largely because ladies of the period disliked the life of the theatre and had no desire to participate in it.

But Fanny Kemble left her mark on the theatre. Sufficient has been shown to prove that, at the time she was alive and acting, the plays of Shakespeare were mangled and maltreated in their presentation. Fanny fought this. She did not fight by leading a crusade or writing significant letters to the newspapers. She fought it by example. How she fought it in conversation with her friends, her acquaintances in the theatre, her father, the managements with whom she had dealings, we have to guess. But that she fought we know from the letters written to Harriet and others in which the subject is mentioned. With her to reason for or against a thing was to fight for or against it; it is unlikely that her protests were confined to letters. And later she took Shakespeare to the people in all the richness, the splendour, vitality, colour, and wisdom of his written word. She took him to ordinary folk who had no chance to witness the occasional and indifferent performances of his plays in neighbouring towns. She took him to people who had never known him; boys in school and working people in their clubs, in the provincial areas of both Britain and America, and to the rich who were fighting so hard for money that they had 'wasted' little time on the Bard. The plays she read were honest, unmangled, cut only to ensure that the weight and power of each should be given the audience. She kept alive and extended a genuine love of Shakespeare, devoid of commercialism and its worst attempts to cater for those seeking sensationalism and stunts.

That was good work to achieve. It should not be overlooked, as it has been overlooked by many who protest their own admiration for Shakespeare and ignore her harder share in keeping an honourable interpretation for the work of the greatest poet, dramatist, and writer this country will ever have or the world will ever know. . . .

But on this evening in 1849, in the Sansom Street Hall, these years and these events are still ahead of her, the daily events, the excitement, the tragedies, the humour, even the controversy about her failings and strengths, as yet unknown to her.

At this moment after years of misery, she is a free woman, working as she

wished to work, her tongue for ever busy with love of Shakespeare, her pen never still. The play she most loved to read was *Henry V*. It may well be said that 'Thus far, with rough and all-unable pen, our bending author hath pursued the story, in little room confining mighty men, mangling by starts the full course of their glory' but it is appropriate to leave her, at her scarlet table, in her purple gown, starting off on the work which filled her years of consolation, the hall before her gone suddenly silent as her voice gives tongue:

'Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts;
Into a thousand parts divide one man,
And make imaginary puissance;
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i' the receiving earth;
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there; jumping o'er times,
Turning the accomplishment of many years
Into an hour-glass: for the which supply
Admit me Chorus to this history;
Who prologue-like your humble patience pray,
Gently to hear, kindly to judge, our play.'

THE END

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